DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 182 410 UD 020 252

AUTHOR Linebaugh, Barbara
TITLE The African School and the Integration of Nantucket Public Schools, 1825-1847.
INSTITUTION Boston Univ., Mass.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 63p.
AVAILABLE FROM Boston University, Afro-American Studies Department, Mountfort Street, Brookline, MA 02146 ($4.00)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Education: *Black History: Blacks: *Black Students: Caucasians: *Racial Discrimination: *School Integration
IDENTIFIERS *Massachusetts (Nantucket)

ABSTRACT

This historical study examines the events surrounding the racial integration of Nantucket public schools during the 1840s. Included are: a brief history of blacks on the island; moves toward school integration; the reaction among island residents to the issue; and the legislative action to resolve it. Appendices include statements by Nantucket residents and the legislative action intended to resolve the issue. A bibliography and photographs are included. (Author/WP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED182410

JAN 30 1980

The African School and the Integration of Nantucket Public Schools

1825–1847

BY
BARBARA LINEBAUGH

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Barbara Linebaugh

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Afro-American Studies Center
Boston University

UD020252

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people who gave me help and encouragement in the production of this manuscript: Dr. Adelaide Cromwell Gulliver, Director of Afro-American Studies at Boston University; Dr. Joseph Boskin, Professor of History at Boston University and my advisor; Floyd Barbour, Adjunct Professor of Afro-American Studies; Madeline Perry, Town Clerk of Nantucket; and Doreen Almy, my mother and typist.

Copyright © 1978 by Barbara Ann Linebaugh. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any means or for any purpose, except that short excerpts may be quoted in a review, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Table of Contents

Preface v

Chapter I:
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AFRICAN SCHOOL

The Establishment of Public Schools on Nantucket 1

The Black Community on Nantucket 3

The Establishment of the African School 5

Instructors at the African School 7

Divisive Issues of the 1840s 11

Chapter II:
THE OPENING MOVES TOWARD INTEGRATION

1840: Eunice Ross Applies to Enter the High School 13

Attitudes Harden: Blacks Are Barred from Halls 15

The Integrationists Suffer Defeat 17

The Black Community Responds 19

The Abolitionists Meet Increasing Opposition 20

Chapter III:
INTEGRATION AGAINST THE TOWN'S WISHES

The Explosive Town Meeting of 1843 23

The School Committee Is Asked to Resign 26

Newspapers as a Forum for the Debate 28

Integration 33

Reaction to Integration 34

Segregation Reinstituted 37

Chapter IV:
RESOLUTION OF THE INTEGRATION ISSUE

Afro-American Boycott of Schools 39

The Passage of Early Civil Rights Legislation 40

Town Meeting Votes to Continue Segregation 41

Phebe Ann Boston vs. the Town of Nantucket 43

1846 Town Meeting: Public Opinions Shifts 47

The Second Integration of Nantucket Schools 49

Appendix A:
PETITION OF EUNICE ROSS TO THE MASSACHUSETTS STATE HOUSE, 1845 50

Appendix B:
ADDRESS TO THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND OTHER INHABITANTS OF THE TOWN OF NANTUCKET, MARCH 2 51

Appendix C:
PETITION OF EDWARD J. POMPEY AND 104 OTHERS TO THE MASSACHUSETTS STATE HOUSE, 1845 55

Appendix D:
HOUSE BILL NO. 45, 1845 56

Bibliography 57

Preface

The integration of the public schools on Nantucket Island stirred up an eight-year controversy during the 1840s which included an Afro-American boycott of the school system, petitions to the Massachusetts State House, long debates at the annual town meetings, and violence. An important result of the battle to admit Blacks to the high school on the Island was a bill passed in 1845 which guaranteed equal education to all, thus making Nantucket responsible for the passage of an early civil rights bill. The law did not cover all contingencies, since it only guaranteed the Blacks equal rights to schooling; but it did not rule out the possibility of segregated, publicly subsidized schools.

This case study about the Afro-Americans' struggle to integrate the Island school system is painfully reminiscent of the struggles of the 1950s. The arguments appear to reecho throughout American history. Eunice Ross, the young Black woman who first applied to go to a nonsegregated school on Nantucket, and those who worked for so long to achieve integration, thought that the time was imminent when segregation would be abolished. The 1844 School Committee predicted that one day such ideas would be "swept away into the great sea of bygone follies." As we know, the "folly" of racism is an ever-present spectre in America, and Eunice Ross was a victim of it.

The African School still stands on Nantucket, one of the few historic buildings left unrestored, with not even a plaque to indicate its role in the Island's history. Left alone, the building will soon collapse, and no tangible memorial will remain to commemorate the young Afro-Americans who studied there. But, as one anonymous letter writer in the 1840s wrote, the town records "will be a standing memorial of the truth" of the injustice of segregation. It is my hope that this manuscript will also be a memorial to Eunice Ross, Phebe Ann Boston and countless other unnamed Blacks who have fought racism and inferior education.

This paper is an outgrowth of research done while the author was a candidate for the M.A. degree in Afro-American Studies at Boston University.

Chapter I:
The Establishment of the African School

The Establishment of Public Schools on Nantucket

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed its first public school law in 1789, requiring all towns to provide public elementary and grammar schools. The island of Nantucket, thirty miles to sea, ignored the law. Private schools had been established, and there was little concern or interest in the creation of town-supported schools.

It was not until 1818 that a seven-member public School Committee was created with a budget of $1,000. This committee's job was to investigate whether there was a need for public schools on the island. On May 7, the committee reported that there were 300 children, ages three to fourteen, who were unable to obtain a private education. The committee was especially concerned about the children of the very poor—

> who are destitute of the means of usefull instruction and who without the benefit of publick Schools Can Never Share the advantages arising from literary Improvement . . .[1]

The committee recommended that four schools of fifty children be established, each having a school mistress, and a fifth for more advanced students, having a school master.

The following year the School Committee was reduced to five members and the budget was halved. In addition, the bulk of the monies went to support the Fragment Society, a Quaker charitable group which had provided some education for the poor since 1814. Their school served only thirty pupils, and education was limited to the warm months because the building was not heated. By reducing the committee and its budget, and by abdicating the education of the poor to a charity, the town virtually abandoned public education after a single year.

This situation continued until Samuel Haynes Jenks moved to the island in the 1820s. Jenks became editor of the *Inquirer* in 1822, one year after its inception. An "off-islander," he became a leading advocate of the reestablishment

[1] *Nantucket Town Records*, May 7, 1818. (The original spelling and punctuation in quoted materials have been retained throughout.)

of a public school system. His ideas were frequently rejected by the Islanders as being "Boston notions" but he gradually gained support as he frequently editorialized the issue.

It took considerable agitation, led mainly by Jenks and his brother-in-law, Cyrus Pierce, before opposition to public schools subsided. The issue once again came to the floor of the annual town meeting in 1825. A committee appointed the previous year reported that there was a great need for public education on the island. One thousand five hundred dollars was then voted to aid the poor in the education of their children, but only about half of the sum was spent. Five schools were established with 180 pupils in attendance, and some students were placed in private schools at town expense. One of the schools established was the African School, a school

> composed of colored children, whose advancement in education has afforded satisfaction to the committee when they have visited the school . . .[2]

In 1826, the policy was maintained with the identical budget. But the system was criticized by the proponents of public education. They did not envision the school system as merely helping children of the poor, nor as "charity schools," such as that of the Fragment Society. They envisioned a public school system for all the town's children. Jenks and others thus kept up their clamor for public education. Jenks and two others complained to the State Attorney General that the island was in violation of the 1789 law and, in 1826, a bill of indictment was brought against the town. The bill stated that the town was obliged by law to provide a grammar school and even stipulated what subjects were to be taught.

The following year the state legislature put some teeth in the 1789 law by fixing penalties for towns in violation. Nantucket, sensing a losing battle, acted at its next annual town meeting and set up a proper school system with adequate funding, and also increased the size of the School Committee to twelve. Jenks was elected to this committee. Thus, by 1827 public schools were permanently established on the island. However, it took eleven more years before the town would establish a high school. Finally, in 1838 the School Committee recommended a high school be established and money was thereby appropriated; it opened its doors in April of that year.

Partly responsible for the growing interest in public education was the "Nantucket County Association for the Promotion of Education and the Improvement of Schools." Commonly called the Education Society, it consisted of staunch advocates of public education, many of them abolitionists who would later involve themselves in the integration controversy as well. At one of their first meetings they were addressed by Horace Mann, who was to become a frequent visitor and lecturer but who apparently stood apart from Nantucket's problems.

[2]Ibid., May 4, 1826.

Entrance to the new high school was based on a qualifying examination, a very common practice for the time. Cyrus Pierce, secretary of the Education Society and an abolitionist, was appointed first principal. By the time the first application for admittance was filed by a Black student in 1840, however, he had already resigned his post.

The Black Community on Nantucket

The Black community on Nantucket in the early 1800s lived mainly in the section of town called "New Guinea" around what is now upper Pleasant Street. The area was originally separated from the rest of the town by a sheep pasture, also known as Newtown Gate.

Many Blacks were descendants of the slaves of the early island residents, many of whom were Quakers. Although not all the early records have survived, there is evidence of a small Black population by 1710. The first record in the Wills and Estates is in the 1710 will of William Gayer, who left a chamber in his home and half of a "leanto" for life to "Africa, a Negro once my servant."

More Blacks appear in subsequent wills, leading to an inference of their presence on the island at least during the late 1600s. Unlike Africa, most Blacks inherited nothing, appearing in these wills only as transferable property. For example, in 1718, Stephen Hussey left in his will "a Negro woman named Sarah" to his wife and sons. One of his sons was also bequeathed a "negro boy named Mark" and his daughter was left "a negro girl, Dorothy." Such bequests were not uncommon.

Some wills did free Blacks and the free Black population grew gradually, especially after the Quakers adopted an increasingly abolitionist stance through which members were encouraged to manumit their slaves. Eventually it became quite unfashionable for a Quaker to be slaveholder.

After 1770, slavery was terminated on the island as a result of the court case of Prince Boston, a slave belonging to William Swain. Boston had signed aboard a whaleship belonging to a successful whaling entrepreneur, William Rotch, but when Boston returned, Swain claimed the Black's wages by right of ownership. Rotch, an influential citizen, defended Boston in court and they won the case. Boston was the first slave in Massachusetts emancipated due to a jury's verdict; and it has been locally alleged that, as a result, all the slaves on the island were freed. No verifying document has survived.

By 1820, out of a population of 7,266, there were 274 Blacks, a number that remained fairly constant for the next few decades. Some additional Blacks came via the Underground Railroad, but too few in number to augment substantially the Black presence on the island. Two were Arthur and Mary Cooper, fugitives from Virginia who arrived on the island aboard a sloop in 1820. The Coopers eventually became influential members of the Black community.

Arthur became the minister of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church.

In 1822, several lawmen arrived with slave-catcher Camillus Griffiths of Virginia, to claim the Coopers. The agents appeared at the Cooper house before sunrise one morning only to find a crowd of Blacks waiting for them. One of them, the cow-tender, George Washington, went to alert William Mitchell, a prominent white citizen. Mitchell, in turn, sent round to wake other town fathers. Several town officials appeared on the scene and tried to delay the deputies. They demanded to see the arrest warrant and then inquired as to its authenticity. Alfred Folger, the island magistrate, demanded more proof and the deputy guarding the rear exit of the Cooper house then came around to the front, fearful of the ever-growing crowd. Magistrate Folger warned the slave-catchers that he would arrest anyone who tried to take the Coopers away, saying that the State of Massachusetts did not recognize slavery. Griffiths correctly pointed out to Folger that the federal law concerning fugitive slaves superseded the state law and demanded that Folger dismiss the crowd and assist them in apprehending the Coopers. Folger refused and then stepped aside while Sylvanus Macy took up the argument.

Meanwhile, Thomas Macy, his brother, had gone into the Cooper house and had exchanged clothes with Arthur. The Coopers then left through the rear door with their baby. They hid that day at the magistrate's house and were secreted by various people for the next week. One house they stayed in was that of Oliver Gardner, father of Anna, who was later to become a leading abolitionist and a teacher at the African School.

But despite the protection given to the Coopers, the abolitionists did not constitute a majority of the island population, and even if they had, it is unlikely that Blacks would have been totally integrated into Nantucket life. Thus, the Black community created, by necessity, a system of parallel institutions, including separate stores, churches and later even a separate abolitionist society. The first Black church was established in 1823 or 1824 and was known as the "African Church." By 1831, this was known as the "York Street Baptist Church." In 1835, an African Methodist Episcopal Church was established.

A rare glimpse at the 1838 Fourth of July Celebratiion illustrates how far apart the races were. In its account of the Fourth, *The Inquirer* reported about a religious service for the island children and noted, in passing, that the children of the African School "were not in attendance this year but asssembled elsewhere to do the honors of the day . . . in some other mode."[3]

Four days later, a lengthy letter from "B" to *The Inquirer* told how he, a white man, had observed the ceremonies held by the Nantucket Blacks on Independence Day. He noted that he had been taking a walk when he noticed lights on at the two Black churches.

[3] *The Inquirer*, July 11, 1838.

> My curiosity was not a little excited to know what these colored people could be about on *Independent Day*. I approached the door of the nearest house: all was quiet; there was no sound of merry-making; no notes of music; no joyous laugh . . .[4]

He went on to describe a meeting in the Zion Church, of over 150 Blacks who were well dressed and paid "the strictest attention" to the principle [sic] speaker who addressed the Juvenile Anti-Slavery Society for over an hour and a half. "B" said that "a sort of solemn awe" prevailed over those present. The thirty to forty members of the youth group were closest to the pulpit and several of them also spoke.

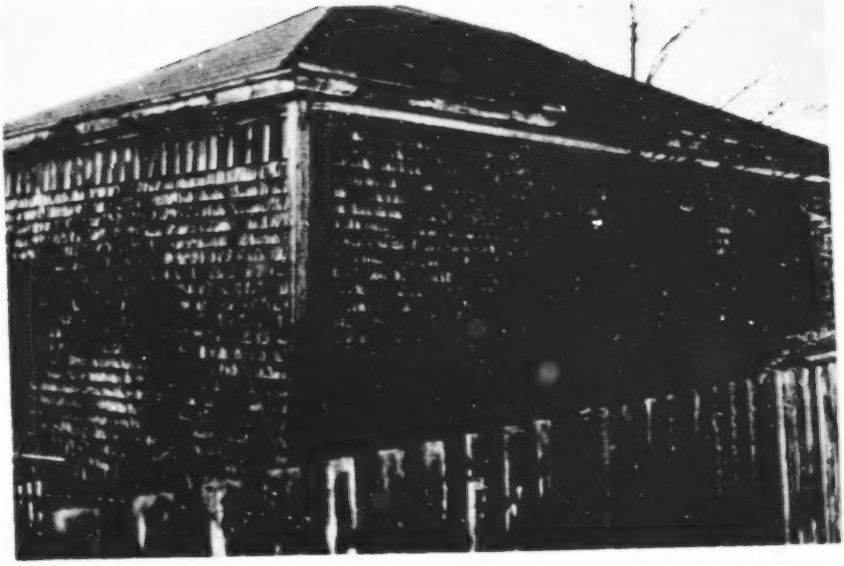
The spectator was especially intrigued by the demeanor of the Blacks; "they appeared to feel they were about a *holy* work . . . ." Later, he walked through the Black section and described the silence of the evening. "B," who was to write many letters supporting integration in the next decade, thought that the Black observance of the Fourth July was most appropriate.

> Their brethren are yet in bonds; they are crushed under the strong arm of Republican despotism. There is no peace, no liberty for the colored man in these Independent States . . . They understand that though our Constitution proclaims freedom and equality; it is freedom and equality only to the *white* man . . .[5]

The Establishment of the African School

Exactly when the African School, located on the corner of York and Pleasant Streets, was built is unclear. The building's primary function was that of a church and there was an active congregation there until 1888. Different names were used in referring to the building, making dating difficult. It was variously called the "African School," the "African Church," the "York Street Colored Baptist Church" and the "Colored Baptist Church." Historians have generally singled out 1826 as the earliest date, although some claim it to be 1831. In point of fact, the building was probably built in 1823 or 1824. *The Inquirer* referred to an "African Church" as early as January 3, 1825. It stated that on that date a building "for the purpose of accommodating the colored population, will be consecrated as a house of worship at two o'clock." It said that "their" preacher, Mr. Lake, would give a sermon, to be followed by a collection to help with "expenses of completing the house."[6] Thus, the African School/Church was being built as early as 1824. On April 11, 1825, there was a classified advertisement referring to the African School specifically, proving it existed almost as early as the church. This advertise-

[4]Ibid., July 15, 2.
[5]Ibid.
[6]Ibid., January 3, 1825, 3.



The African School today is much altered, having been used as a storage area for some years. It is owned by William Higginbotham, who hopes one day to restore it.
Photo by Andrew Linebaugh

ment is the first reference to the school and it notified the public when the examination of the pupils of the African School would commence:

> under the direction of their teacher, the Reverend Frederick Baylies. Such ladies and gentlemen as may honour Mr. Baylies with their attendance will be provided with comfortable seats.[7]

Historians have found it difficult to date the school because the land for the school/church was not purchased until February 14, 1826. The Registry of Deeds recorded that the land was bought by "Trustees of the African Baptist Society" from Jeffrey Summons, a "coloured man and labourer," for $10.50. The Trustees are listed as Peter and Absalom Boston, Michael DeLuce and Charles Godfrey.[8] How could the school have been established in 1824, and how could the partially completed church have been consecrated in 1825? Probably Summons had leased the land to the group, but the Blacks were already organized, as they already had elected Trustees. It is possible that an arrangement had been made to begin construction before the land was actually bought.

[7] Ibid., April 11, 1825, 3.
[8] *Registry of Deeds*, Volume 28, 438.

The School Committee Report given in early 1826 also mentions the African School in its discussion of its actions of the previous year, adding to the proof that the building was erected before 1825.

The next account of the building did not appear until the end of 1826 when a public notice was submitted to the paper by Absalom Boston, a descendant of Prince, concerning a discourse against slavery delivered by Reverend Jacob Perry in the African Church. At the end of the lecture, it stated that a collection would be taken up for the purchase of a pulpit. By the end of 1826, the building itself was ostensibly complete and the Blacks were working on the finishing touches.

Throughout the years, the building served multiple purposes, being simultaneously a church, a school and a meeting house. In 1834, vaccinations for smallpox were given there "to all persons of color."[9] Lectures against slavery were often presented there and the Black Anti-Slavery Society held meetings in the building. In 1837, a chandelier was donated by a group of whites to the building; on June 17 the Black congregation placed an advertisement in the paper thanking them:

> The Colored Baptist Church and Society of Nantucket express their thanks to those Gentlemen who have recently furnished their Meeting House with an elegant chandelier.[10]

Instructors at the African School

Two men, both white, are usually credited with the original idea of establishing a school for the Black community. Frederick Baylies served as the first instructor and is often named as the school's founder. Other unofficial sources offer Deacon William Rawson as its originator. (Death records name him Wilson Rawson.) Undoubtedly both men had a hand in the work, along with supportive members of the Black community, such as Absalom Boston and Edward J. Pompey, both members of long-standing Black families on the Island.

An itinerant missionary in southern New England, Baylies was also active at three schools on Martha's Vineyard and a school in Narragansett, Rhode Island. He usually stayed on the island about one month each year.

Baylies was first specifically mentioned in the 1827 School Committee Report to the town:

> . . . A School for coloured children has also been maintained, under the superintendence of the Town Committee which has embraced about 40 scholars. Their efforts to improve the condition of this class of children have been aided by Mr. Baylies, who has efficiently exartion Labouring by his precepts to improve instruction and enforsing that precept by his example.[11]

[9] *The Inquirer*, June 21, 1834, 3.
[10] Ibid., June 17, 1837, 3.
[11] *Nantucket Town Records*, 1827.

Anna Gardner, abolitionist and instructor at the African School for four years.
Photo by W. Frederick Lucas

The author of a letter to *The Inquirer* of May 2, 1829, also praised Baylies, stating that he had attended an examination at the African School, which then housed about thirty students. He was so impressed with Baylies' work that he said he would write to the townspeople. He stated that Baylies' actual job was solely that of a visiting preacher and that he could easily have confined his work to Sunday preaching. Instead, he chose to also act as

> . . . school master, and to his close assiduous and unremitting attention may be chiefly ascribed the progress these children have made in literature, morality and civil deportment . . .[12]

But Baylies could only remain on the island for one month, so another teacher was sought. The first full-time teacher hired was Miss Thomson, about whom little is known except that in 1827 she was in charge of forty pupils, a staggering number, especially since they were of many ages. In 1829, a Jacob Perry succeeded to the post, with Baylies still making his annual visit. Perry was possibly the first and only Black teacher; he was amply praised by *The Inquirer* in 1829 in one of its infrequent references to the school:

> . . . The school is at present, and has been for some time past, under the instruction of Mr. Perry, an intelligent and worthy man of colour, who also officiates as minister to the coloured people of this town . . . The present number of scholars in the African School in this town, is forty-seven; of whom 34 write, 30 read in the Testament, 12 in Spelling books and 5 in the alphabet—their writing would do credit to scholars whose opportunities would have been much greater than those children have had, and their reading, spelling, exercises in arithmetic &c, &c were very creditable both to their instructor and themselves . . .[13]

The article went on to encourage philanthropists to support the school and expressed the belief that education was the way for Blacks to achieve equality.

> . . . As a development of the human faculties in the pursuit of arts and sciences, is the surest passport to honour and happiness, and the best guarantee of our civil and religious liberties, every well conducted seminary of learning should be kindly fostered and amply supported as such, we recommend the African School in this town to the attention and patronage of the philanthropic. The manifest improvement of the pupils, their decent appearance and orderly deportment, furnish the best and most satisfactory evidence that those who have had the management of this school, have been faithful and persevering in the discharge of their important duties. We have seldom enjoyed an entertainment more pleasing and rational, the exercises of which were closed by a fervent and appropriate supplication to the Throne of Grace, offered by Mr. Perry.[14]

[12] *The Inquirer*, May 2, 1829, 2.
[13] Ibid., April 18, 2.
[14] Ibid.

This was certainly high praise for the school; it is, furthermore, the only detailed picture of the pupils, the curriculum, the teachers, and the quality of instruction, during the more than two decades of the school's operation.

A footnote commenting on the "respectable" number of citizens present at the examination followed, in which the paper noted with disapproval that not one member of the School Committee had attended.

Mr. Perry and the school were also praised by the May 2 letter to the editor in praise of Frederick Baylies. Its author related that Baylies had started the school and Miss Thomson had been employed

> . . . until their present teacher and pastor, Mr. Perry, a coloured man, arrived at the Island, and all the income this minister and schoolmaster receives for his services, is what the town allows him as schoolmaster, *which is small indeed;* so that he will be forced to leave this island, to seek in some more genial clime a bare subsistence, which is the height of his ambition . . .[15]

It is not really clear when or why Jacob Perry left the island, but it was certainly by 1834, when a notice appeared in the paper advertising for a female teacher for the African School. Within a week of the advertisement, it was reported that Eliza Bailey was appointed, to be followed only two years later by Anna Gardner, poetess, diarist and, in her last years, a leading suffragette. A prominent abolitionist during her stay on the island, she taught for a year in a Freedmen's Bureau school in Reconstruction Virginia. While there she kept a diary of her activities, but unfortunately no notes have been found relating to her tenure at the African School.

Anna Gardner taught in the African School for four years, and it was during her employment that the integration controversy began. She would seem to figure in the School Committee Report of 1838, although not specified by name.

> . . . The African School presented to your committee apperances peculiarly gratifying. We have witness in this School, proofs of talent little in accordence with opinions entertained by some, that the coloured people are inferior in intelect to the white. The community for whose benefit this School was Established, is in the opinion of your Committee peculiarly fortunate in having a teacher for their children able, zealous and faithful, one who knowing their wants, and feeling for their Situation, is eminently qualified to assist in elevating a race hitherto looked down upon, to a rank and Station, in which Colour shall no longer be considered a mark of ignorance; a cause for legal exceptions, or an excuse for oppression.[16]

Thus, the Committee appeared sympathetic to the problem of segregation and was pleased with Gardner's work. Undoubtedly, one of the pupils who was shown off to the Committee was Eunice Ross, the star pupil, who was soon to be ready to enter a high school. Yet Anna Gardner ceased teaching

[15] Ibid., May 2, 1829, 2.
[16] *Nantucket Town Records*, 1838.

around this time. Her duties as secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society may have demanded her full attention. At any rate, an advertisement in November 1840 invited either males or females to apply for the vacancy.

Four months later, another advertisement appeared stipulating that only males need apply. Perhaps the interim teacher, who was a woman, had not handled the class well. Or perhaps the Committee, in its concern that Blacks receive an equivalent education, had decided to dispense with schoolmarms; in those days only males were considered qualified to teach the upper levels. This advertisement is the last indication of a vacancy at the school. No records reveal who was appointed or whether the same teacher remained until the school was closed seven years later. The notices that occasionally appeared solicited teachers for the school system at-large, specifying no particular school. Nevertheless, it is possible that there were several teachers at the Black school during its remaining years, considering the precarious tenure of the known instructors.

Divisive Issues of the 1840s

The 1840's saw divisiveness over the entire nation, and an increasing split between North and South, and on the Island of Nantucket.

The island was divided over the national issues as reflected in the two newspapers of the 1840s, the Whig *Inquirer* and a new paper begun in March 1840, *The Islander,* which was Democratic. These two papers also divided the island and were primarily sounding boards for the interests of their particular political party, and were far more interested in reporting national and international news than local news. They assumed people *knew* the local news and often printed stories that omitted many facts thought to be understood. The two papers attacked each other frequently and unreservedly. *The Inquirer,* for example, was wont to refer to *The Islander* as the "I slander."

The community was particularly divided over the issue of temperance. A variety of abstinence societies were initiated, urging people to "take the Pledge" and vow to abstain from alcohol. It was also divided over how to treat the poor, and the "poor farm" at Quaise was the center of much debate. With whaling in decline, various groups argued about the introduction of a suitable industry to replace it.

In contrast, abolitionism had only recently become a controversial issue. Nantucket, with its Quaker influence, had boasted an active group of abolitionists as far back as 1716, when a monthly meeting of Quakers recorded that it "is not agreeable to Truth for Friends to purchase slaves . . ."[17] Nantucketer Elihu Coleman's tract against slavery in 1729 was the second such article written by an American[18] and went through several

[17] James Monaghan, "Anti-Slavery in Nantucket," Proceedings of the *Nantucket Historical Association,* 1938, 23.

[18] The first was written by Daniel Pastorius.

national editions. The ever-present element of anti-abolitionism finally came to the forefront in the 1840s because of the controversy over the African School. The feeling was manifest in a disparate group among whom were people sincerely opposed to slavery, but who nevertheless distrusted the ardor of abolitionists, as especially exemplified by William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison lectured several times on the Island during the 1840s.

No controversy separated the island during the 1840s as much as that of the African School, perhaps because for the first time islanders were being asked to implement lofty principles that in the abstract had seemed unobjectionable. Their quandary attracted off-island interest and a distinguished array of visitors, including abolitionists such as Garrison, Lucretia Mott, an islander by birth, Frederick Douglass, who gave his first public speech on the island, and C. Lenox Remond, the Black Bostonian abolitionist, recently interested in what was happening on Nantucket.

On the issue of admitting Blacks to the high school, the local papers were generally silent, and months, even years, went by without editorial comment, even when the battle was at its height. Most references to the controversy were made in letters to the editors. Evidently, the issue was too volatile for the papers. Even though both papers attacked the institution of slavery, neither identified with the abolitionist cause and both were fearful of "amalgamation" with Blacks. The papers probably agreed with the majority of islanders that it was dangerous to allow Blacks to mingle too much with the Whites. *The Islander*, which sided with the integrationists with its dying gasps, was always a minority paper and went out of business in 1843, years before the issue of the school was resolved. The most valuable sources about the controversy are the records of the town meetings; unfortunately, they do not carry actual debates but merely state, matter-of-factly, the motions made and voted upon. For eight years, 1840–47, the issue of integration took up the majority of the annual town meeting's time, but the bitterness of the debate can be barely discerned in the motions made. Who was elected to the School Committee, and the terse notes written by recorders who, perhaps for reasons of their own, rarely ventured descriptive comment, are all that are left to indicate the emotion-packed assemblies.

Chapter II:
The Opening Moves Toward Integration

1840: Eunice Ross Applies to Enter the High School

The first inkling of the controversy soon to erupt over segregation was in a classified notice in *The Inquirer*, May 4, 1839, concerning a discussion to be held by the Education Society, which met regularly to discuss and debate current educational issues. The question for discussion was:

> Should the present public provision for popular Education be enlarged as to furnish what is commonly called 'liberal education' to all qualified applicants?[1]

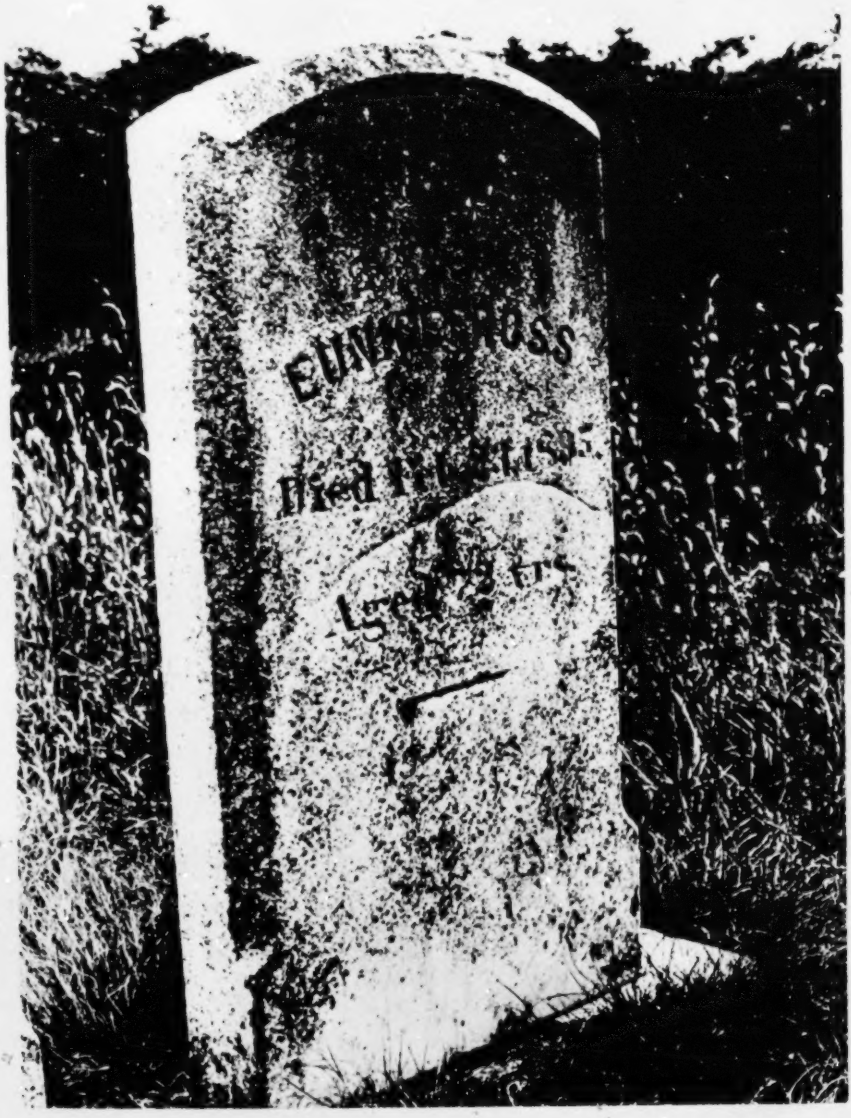
Unfortunately, the paper did not report the discussion, but it was undoubtedly lively as the issue was soon to divide the community.

No further references to the explosive question appeared during the following year, but the forces toward integration were probably aligning. In June, 1840, at town meeting, the first formal move was made toward integration. Edward Gardner moved:

> To see if the Town will instruct the School Committee to permit coloured children to enter all or any of the public schools of this Town.[2]

The motion was voted down. John H. Shaw, a member of the School Committee, who later emerged as one of the primary spokesmen for integration, moved that the School Committee continue to educate the Blacks separately. Isaac Austin, an abolitionist and member of the Education Society, moved that the matter was up to the School Committee and that it was not "right or expedient" for the meeting to instruct the committee on the matter. Austin did not want the town to go on record opposing integration because he had faith that the School Committee would integrate the schools that year; a town vote to the contrary would have prevented that. The thirteen-member School Committee for the upcoming year had at least five well-known abolitionists on it, along with others identified as progressive.

[1] *The Inquirer*, May 4, 1839, 3.
[2] Nantucket Town Records, 1840, 223.



Tombstone of Eunice Ross in the all-Black cemetery on Nantucket Island.
Photo by H. Flint Ranney

The controversy was precipitated by Eunice Ross, a seventeen-year-old Black student at the African School. We know from her own handwriting on a petition which she presented to the State Legislature in 1845 that she applied to enter the high school in 1840. She was "found amply qualified" yet was denied admission by the town when they voted down Edward Gardner's motion.[3] Yet, nowhere in any town document or newspaper of 1840 is there any mention of Eunice Ross. Her petition in the State House vault is the only record that she was denied equal education.

A little more about Eunice Ross is revealed by her obituary in *The Inquirer and Mirror*[4] March 2, 1895. It mentions that she had been taught by the reformer, Anna Gardner, at the African School. It states that Miss Ross

> was an apt scholar, and Miss Gardner had advanced her until she was qualified for entrance to the High School, where she made application for admission. Public indignation was aroused at this (as then termed) 'outrage.'

The "public indignation" was to continue for a long time, but despite this initial defeat, neither Eunice Ross nor the abolitionists were ready to accept defeat.

Attitudes Harden: Blacks Are Barred from Halls

The year following Eunice Ross's application, the outgoing School Committee reported 49 scholars at the African School, with 1,392 in the total system. In their report they described the educational progress of a typical pupil through the system.

> Having passed through the Introductory Schools, he is advanced to the Grammar, and thence to the High School, by an access available to every scholar, who has ability and perseverance.[5]

Yet, this was not the case; Eunice Ross and other Black students did not have the same access in spite of ample "ability and perseverance." The Committee recognized this inequality despite the previous statement, because they went on to write:

> The Committee would also recommend to their successors in office, the establishment of some plan, whereby the higher branches of education may be communicated to the children of the coloured population, as fully and as satisfactorily, as to those of the white citizens.[6]

They did not specify how to "communicate" the higher branches to the

[3]Petition of Eunice F. Ross, Massachusetts State House Archives. See Appendix for complete text.
[4]*The Inquirer* had merged with a rival, *The Mirror*.
[5]*Nantucket Town Records*, 1841, 64.
[6]Ibid.

Black children. They were not ready to advocate integration, but recognized that changes were necessary.

In the Democratic *Islander*, January 16, 1841, there was a letter to the editor signed, "Thy Friend," which attacked the School Committee and the segregation of the schools, the first of many such letters to be printed during the next few years. It was prompted by a report that the Atheneum, Nantucket's library, then also used as a meeting hall, was to be closed to Blacks. The letter denounced racist northern attitudes and complained that there were not enough attacks on slavery in churches and schools. The author imagined what a Southerner might ask a Northerner:

> . . . Are your Atheneums and public buildings all enlisted on the side of freedom? Do you give in this a *practical* illustration of a great truth, that 'All men are created free and *equal* and endowed,' etc? Do you not in your *Christian* churches recognize a negro seat or pew? . . . Are your public schools thrown open, freely, for the instruction of your own children of color? Does your school committee—who should be men of intelligence and moral worth—do they, in their school regulations, recognize no oppresion? . . .
>
> But in asking the above questions, I do not mean to say there are not men and women, and the number is daily increasing, who are true to humanity. There are religious teachers, too, who are faithfully laboring.[7]

Letters in those days were generally very long, and this one went on to attack other hypocrises, such as the Methodist Church's disfranchisement of its Black members.

The year 1841 saw more abolitionist activity than previous years. Obed Barney was especially busy and an anti-slavery library was established over his store in early January. Later that month an Anti-Slavery Fair was held there. In the same issue which announced the library appeared a classified notice from four Black citizens thanking everyone who had helped them to establish a reading room.[8] The library and reading room were probably one and the same as their notices appeared simultaneously.

On January 30, a letter to the editor appeared concerning integration in churches, halls and schools. The author "B," the person who had written the letter some years before about the celebration of the Fourth of July by the Black population."B" tried to belittle what he had heard offered as the most potent argument against integration—amalgamation, or interracial reproduction and had shrugged this off, saying that it was "an every day occurrence in the slave-holding states." In subsequent letters this charge was attacked more thoroughly. He also stated that there were many Blacks he would rather associate with than "some of my own color" and questioned the sense of people who talked about Blacks bettering themselves, yet cut off the avenue of education.

[7] *The Islander*, January 16, 1841, 2.

[8] They were William Harris, William H. Harris, Henry T. Wheeler and William Morris.

> . . . I have deemed it proper that the position of abolitionists should be understood in our community, where the right of the colored man is denied, not only in our meeting houses and vestries, and public lecture rooms, but his privilege is wrested from him even in one of our public schools—a school instituted for the good of the whole people, and which we justly prize for our own children, as the greatest blessing which our 'Republican Laws' can confer upon them . . . .[9]

In the same issue was a letter from H.P. and E.B., executives of the Women's Anti-Slavery Society. E.B. refers to Eliza Barney, wife of Nathaniel, and H.P. refers to Hannah Pierce, wife of Cyrus. They reported that the women had to refuse to hold meetings at the North Congregational Church because the church would not allow them to admit Blacks to the meetings. They explained that the society even had been willing to set aside half of the room to those who did not wish to mix with the Blacks as a concession to the church, but that this compromise was also unacceptable to the church.

> . . . These being refused we can make no other compromise; as our object is to *improve* and *elevate* the colored man and not to lend our aid in his oppression.[10]

Yet, with all of this apparent interest and agitation, there was no account in any paper regarding the town meeting and the School Committee recommendation to the incoming committee to work toward making sure that Blacks also received the upper levels of education.

In August, there was a three-day Anti-Slavery Convention on the island at which William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass spoke, as well as those Nantucketers who were soon to become primary agitators for school integration: Nathaniel Barney, Anna Gardner, Andrew M. Macy, Isaac and Charlotte Austin, Peter Macy and David Joy. Joy was president of the local Anti-Slavery Society, as well as a very influential citizen who was elected to the Board of Selectmen for several years during this period. However, as the issue became more controversial, he lost his seat.

The Integrationists Suffer Defeat

1842 was a year which saw rising controversy about the schools. William R. Easton, a former School Committee member and a Selectman that year, whose position in regard to this question seems somewhat erratic, made the motion:

> That the cause of Education is of paramount consideration; involving as it does the most cherished interest of this Community, that no party consideration, should influence the action of any one . . .[11]

It appears that the abolitionists were too "party-oriented" for Easton's lik-

[9] *The Islander*, January 30, 1841, 2.
[10] *The Islander*, January 30, 1842, 2.
[11] *Nantucket Town Records*, 1842, 69.

ing and he believed that it was affecting their impartiality as School Committee members.

The next day, abolitionist Nathaniel Barney, a member of the outgoing School Committee, amended the above motion to read:

> And that if in either of our schools there is any inequality or discrimination, every consideration of duty and justice requires of us to lay aside our party feelings and prejudices, and place the Scholars in that school, *in* the other public schools with reference to their eligibility to said schools.[12]

Amazingly, this was accepted. This eliminated the segregation of the high school and other public schools and would have eliminated the entire controversy. No records of the attendance are available, but it can be speculated that this meeting was not heavily attended, as is often true of the second day of town meeting. Imagine the consternation of those who did not attend when they heard about the admittance of Blacks to any public school! The next day they were probably at the meeting in force, as there was a vote to reconsider the previous day's vote to integrate. Written ballots were called for denoting the gravity of the matter. Thus, the issue was debated again. Andrew Macy, who was a prime spokesman for integration and a long-time member of the Anti-Slavery Society, moved to strike Nathaniel Barney's anti-discrimination amendment and this was so voted. There is no explanation for Macy's move. Thus, the Barney amendment was deleted and the original Easton motion, which stated only that party consideration should be set aside, was voted on, again by written ballot, and passed. Thus, the abolitionists, victorious only the day before, saw victory slip out of their grasp. Eunice Ross was still to be excluded from the high school.

The outgoing School Committee was politically split, with men such as Nathaniel Barney and anti-integrationist William C. Starbuck on it. No records of their meetings exist and the committee did not integrate, but one sentence in their annual report indicates what was possibly a concession to the integrationists:

> Give to any people of whatever clime, and whatever complexion, a *right* education, and you lift them from debasement and misery to respectability and happiness . . .[13]

The School Committee for the next year reflected the growing controversy. Fifty-nine people ran for the thirteen positions! At least six Blacks were among them but only one, Edward J. Pompey, received more than two votes; he received fifty-five votes, not enough to be elected. Abolitionists Isaac Austin, Andrew Macy, Peter Macy, Thomas Macy and David Joy, *together* only polled sixteen votes! Although Nathaniel Barney and John Shaw

[12]Ibid.
[13]Ibid., 92.

retained their seats, so did anti-integrationist William Starbuck who polled almost six hundred votes.

The Black Community Responds

The Black community responded to the town meeting in what is the first recorded organized protest, but evidence suggests that the Black community had been active before. No records are extant of meetings that were held during this controversy at the Black churches, the Black Anti-Slavery Society and at the Black temperance meetings. Although these groups met regularly, they had virtually no access to the newspapers and their meetings were not reported. On the afternoon of February 23, the Black community met at the Zion Church to discuss the results of the town meeting. The group passed two resolutions and also issued an "Address to the School Committee, and other Inhabitants of the Town of Nantucket." A synopsis of the meeting, the resolutions and the address were issued to the two newspapers of the town, and the accounts are almost identical.[14] William Harris, Jr., was elected to chair the meeting; William W. Morris was the secretary and Cyrus B. Cooper was assistant secretary.

> The object of the meeting was stated by William Harris alluding to a vote that passed at the later Annual Meeting of this Town. And he also spoke in favor of our fellow citizens who took a Christian part in our behalf; and it was followed by remarks from William R. Robinson, Wesley Berry, and others . . . .

The first resolution was offered by Reverend William Serrington. It stated that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts recognized no distinctions with regard to education and that

> it is therefore the judgement of the oppressed portion of the citizens of Nantucket, that it is their right, and they ought to claim, and do desire to enjoy, among other rights, the right of having their youth educated in the same schools which are common to the more favored members of this community. . . .[15]

William Morris offered the second resolution which caused some debate and it was laid on the table. This evidently was not acceptable, as a move to adjourn until seven o'clock was voted down, and the resolution was taken up again. It was advocated by William R. Robinson, Charlotte D. Brown and others, and passed unanimously. In this resolution, the Afro-Americans voted their thanks to those spokesmen at the town meeting who had advocated full education for their children.

A committee of three, consisting of Reverend Serrington, William W. Morris and William Harris, was then appointed to have thhe proceedings as

[14] *The Islander*, March 12, 1842, and *The Inquirer*, March 2, 1842, 2. See Appendix for full text.

[15] Ibid.

well as the lengthy address published. The address repeatedly refers to the Black people as oppressed and informed the islanders, in no uncertain terms, that the recent town meeting vote was not "a recent wound . . . but a wound of some years standing, the sensation of which, if it be chafed, is apt to become keen.[16] The address stressed that the Constitution and the laws of the Commonwealth did not distinguish on account of "complexion."

> . . . If this be the ground of our exclusion, as we have stated, and we think our statement is undeniable, then we will most respectfully, ask this intelligent and Christian community who know this to be the ground of our exclusion, is it *right*, is it *just*?[17]

The address went on to state that Blacks were "weary" of the "privilege" of having a separate school. It expressed a strong desire to become a part of the mainstream, stating that Black people, too, were "citizens of this great republic; our veins aree full of republican blood." They agreed that the African School was a good one, but that it did not encompass the higher levels of education and that therefore their children were deprived of an equivalent education to that of the "more favored" portion of town. They referred to themselves as "colonized."

The address recognized that some Blacks did "not wish to enjoy equal privileges of education with their lighter colored brethren," but they made it understood that these few would not induce the majority to surrender their rights.

The address ended on an optimistic note hoping that the time was

> not too far distant when the good sense and christianity of this republic will proceed to make its distinctions in society on just and reasonable grounds, not according to the color of skin. . . .[18]

There were no replies or even an acknowledgement of the resolutions and address by the white community. This is unusual because letters to the editor often prompted prolonged debates, stretching out over many weeks. Silence met this letter.

The Abolitionists Meet Increasing Opposition

It was not, however, a silent year for Nantucket's abolitionists, who were very active. The news was full of the pros and cons of abolitionism. In one interesting letter to *The Inquirer*, "Othello" wrote that he was a "bundle of prejudices" who thought "the black skull is peculiarly thick" and thought that Blacks lacked intelligence and eloquence. He related how he was beguiled into going to a local lecture to hear Frederick Douglass, then a preacher in

[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid.
[18]Ibid.

New Bedford, and was amazed at Douglass' charm, eloquence and intelligence. "His mind seemed to overflow with noble ideas," said "Othello," who stated that he "left that hall with a mountain load of prejudice tumbling [from his back]."[19]

In mid-August, an explosive Anti-Slavery Convention was held on Nantucket. William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips and C. Lenox Remond made the trek to the island, to be met by riots. At the Atheneum, on the first night as Garrison spoke in his usual strong terms, stones and rotten eggs were thrown in at the group. The Trustees of the Atheneum, fearing the hall would be wrecked, closed the doors of their institution for the rest of the Convention. Another was secured, but again, a mob attacked and "assailed in a brutal manner."[20] The next day, the group met in yet another building and was again disrupted. Meanwhile, the more influential abolitionists—some of them members of the School Committee—had been pleading with the Selectmen to be allowed use of the Town Hall. At first they were refused, but finally they were admitted. Yet again, a mob formed, throwing stones and rotten eggs in order to disturb the proceedings. Finally, the abolitionists were forced to give up and the national leaders left the island.

This incident had certainly been precipitated by the issue of school integration. Anti-Slavery Conventions had been held on the island before without disturbance, but feelings were running very high in 1842. The Selectmen were highly criticized by the press for not suppressing the mobs, and a slew of letters to the papers questioned whether free speech existed on the island any more. One such letter by "R" questioned how free the "freedman" was:

> He cannot go into the House of God with freedom, in any house in this town (except two which are Quakers, and I am not sure he can go there with perfect freedom). He cannot have his child educated in the common schools, which are established by law for him as well as others; and let him study ever so hard, and educate himself, he cannot use it for any public benefit. For he cannot have any appointment in the state, he cannot be drawn as a juror to sit on a case with one of his own color, he cannot travel on the public roads without being insulted, not because of the law of the state is favorable to any of the above. And now I ask where is the freedom of the colored man in Massachusetts? . . .[21]

Debate was rekindled in November by the Latimer Case. George Latimer, who was a fugitive slave living in Boston, was threatened with return to slavery via the new strict fugitive slave laws. A local Free Latimer Society was formed, headed by Cyrus Pierce and Nathaniel Barney, then on the School Committee. The Anti-Slavery Society, with Peter Macy as President and Anna Gardner as Secretary, circulated a petition favoring Latimer's freedom and laws to prevent slave hunting. The petition was the responsibility of

[19] *The Inquirer*, July 2, 1842, 2.
[20] Ibid, August 20, 1842, 2.
[21] Ibid.

Thomas Macy and Cyrus Pierce. There was also talk of making Nantucket a haven for fugitive slaves.

Thus, 1842 ended with the island divided; the polarization had caused people to resort to the violence of the August mobs. This did not bode well for Black students like Eunice Ross, still waiting to be admitted to the high school.

Chapter III:
Integration Against the Town's Wishes

The Explosive Town Meeting of 1843

In 1843, a radical School Committee was elected and members, Nathaniel Barney among them, pushed for a definitive vote to desegregate the schools at the annual town meeting in February. It was hotly debated and became the main topic of the meeting.

On February 18, Nathaniel Barney moved, as part of the outgoing School Committee's Minority Report, an amendment that the committee be allowed to place students of the African School in any of the other public schools if "an advantage will be gained to the scholar by such a change."[1] According to town records, the debate went on throughout the morning and into the afternoon; it resulted in Barney withdrawing his amendment. A vote to accept the Minority Report was taken by written ballot (an attempt to count hands having failed). It was rejected 194–160.

Barney again moved to allow Afro-American students into other schools by repeating the motion he had made that morning. William Starbuck, not on the School Committee that year, amended Barney's motion to read: "that the African School be continued as heretofore."[2] This was accepted, proving again the town's determination to keep the Blacks separate.

Two days later there was a series of motions pertaining to the African School. The records do not report who made any of them. First, there was a motion to reconsider the five hundred dollar appropriation to the African School, which passed. Next, there was a vote to reconsider the vote of two days previous which had instructed the School Committee to continue the African School. The abolitionist strategy was first to strike out the monies and then, to abolish the school. These motions of reconsideration took the entire morning and in the afternoon session, they first tackled the motion "to abate Five Hundred Dollars"[3] from the African School. This debate led to the

[1] *Nantucket Town Records*, 1843, 145.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid, 147.

reading of the reports of a seven-man committee which had been set up to review town finances.

The Majority Financial Report contained nothing pertinent to the African School, but the Minority Report focused in on the African School almost entirely. The Minority Report, filed by Alfred Folger, Charles W. Rand and Edward W. Gardner, objected to the money spent yearly for the African School as an unnecessary expense to the town, as well as contrary to the "spirit of the law." This cleverly worded document was written by the abolitionists and was designed to discontinue the injustice of separate and unequal education by appealing to a sense of fiscal soundness. It recommended shutting down the African School and re-distributing the students among the other schools, according to qualifications. The recommendations, however, did not pass.

The reading of these reports took the rest of the day and the meeting was adjourned without settling the question of the African School.

The School Committee wanted the matter settled and the six-page report of the School Committee was next taken up. This report coincided with the Minority Financial Report.

> . . . The Law for the establishment of schools, is so general in its application, that it embraces the whole people. The eligibility of the scholar, therefore, to any of our schools, is not to be determined by the circumstances with which he is surrounded. His proficiency entitles him to a place, irrespective of any of the accidents of life which attach to him . . .[4]

But, the recommendations included in this report also failed to pass and the status quo was upheld. However, undaunted, the abolitionists tried again on February 23 by submitting a new town warrant with six resolutions, including one "To see if the Town will establish a School for all Children having Red Hair."[5]

Debate on these resolutions began on the twenty-fifth with Thomas Macy as Moderator. William Starbuck moved, as he had done on the eighteenth, to continue the African School as before. And, once again, the town accepted this, reaffirming the majority's belief in segregation.

Dr. Winslow, however, reiterating the Barney move of a few days before, moved that if any of the pupils in the African School were deemed qualified by the committee to be placed in another school, that they be so placed.

Starbuck countered by moving an indefinite postponement of Winslow's motion. There followed a series of motions and counter-motions in a profusion of parliamentary tactics which took most of the morning. But, finally, it was voted to postpone Winslow's motion, another victory for Starbuck and the anti-integrationists.

[4]Ibid, 173.
[5]Ibid, 177.

Starbuck, riding high on his victory, moved to postpone indefinitely further consideration of *any* subject pertaining to the schools. John Shaw reminded the town that they had voted down the appropriation of the African School and, thus, had no choice but to discuss school matters some more. He questioned how the school could be maintained without monies. Starbuck replied that it was in the School Committee's power to see that the school was taken care of. Then an abolitionist asked Moderator Thomas Macy, also an abolitionist, if the town could legally appropriate money to a school designed specifically for Africans. Macy, true to his beliefs, said he thought that such a tax was illegal and was sure the courts would so decide. Starbuck retorted that if that were the case, the town had been acting illegally for years and scoffed and wondered aloud if anyone had ever "experienced any inconvenience."[6] The records report that some people answered that they had. Presumably the Black voters and abolitionists vocalized that sentiment.

However, despite the tactics of the abolitionists to force the town to resolve the matter of appropriations, people were tired of the school question and voted in favor of Starbuck's motion to postpone any further discussion of the schools. After finishing other town business, the meeting was adjourned.

The town had voted twice to continue the African School, yet had abolished its appropriation. (At a later meeting, a motion was accepted that the School Committee would see that all schools were well cared for, thus, indirectly appropriating money for the upkeep of the African School.)

There were no reports about this lengthy and controversial town meeting in the newspapers until almost a month later. But, letters to the editor were written attacking segregation. *The Inquirer* ran a letter sent to "B" from C. Lenox Remond, on the front page. This was very significant as practically no local matters ever appeared there. Perhaps that indicates the attention *The Inquirer* felt the issue deserved, even though no editorial comments were made about segregation at all that year.

Remond discussed the Latimer Case and went on to attack many abolitionists as hypocrites. He denounced Northern racism and called the "Christian" United States a "sham."[7] He then went on to the question of education on Nantucket. Remond's letter was published March 4, only a week after the conclusion of town meeting, but Remond already knew the specifics of the island politics.

> On your island of Nantucket, has the voice of the people been heard, in Town Meeting assembled, refusing a well qualified colored girl her place in the High School; aye, the citizens of an island many miles removed from the foul system of slavery; so far, one might well suppose, that its pestilential vapors would become purified; but not so; your citizens in their corporate capacity, conspire against the individual rights of a single member, and that, be it said to the shame of the conspirators in the person of a helpless girl!

[6]Ibid, 179.
[7]*The Inquirer*, March 4, 1843, 1.

> . . . these things are enough to make every colored man, even as Job did formerly, curse the day which gave him existence, and I had almost said the mother who bore him, and on bended knee, commended his soul to his God, and then pray that the rocks and mountains might fall on him. With affectionate remembrances, I remain
>
> Very sincerely,
> Your obliged friend,
> C. Lenox Remond[8]

"B" wrote letters attacking slavery during March, but it was not until April 1, well over a month after town meeting, that he referred to the town meeting. The town was undoubtedly full of discussion about the meeting, and "B" said he finally got irritated enough to answer some of the more frequently heard arguments. The one he spent the most time answering was the one that Blacks would infect White children with diseases and that, therefore, it was the duty of the School Committee to exclude them. "B" countered with the notion that Blacks were often immune to White diseases.[9] He also attacked the commonly held idea that Blacks were unclean:

> . . . I had occasion lately to visit several families, embracing different colors, and I do not hesitate to say, that without designing to make an invidious observation, the opinion *forced* itself upon me, that the despised color might well claim to make up in neatness, what it wants, in the estimation of some on the score of complexion! . . .[10]

He went on to discuss the rights of parents to take their own children out of school, but not to keep another parent's child out.

> . . . The school law is not graduated by color, else the statute securing a privileged order would long since have been brought out in this community . . . A colored citizen is eligible to the highest gift which it is in the power of the people to bestow. . . .[11]

"B" had probably been prompted to write these letters, not only because of the town meeting, but also because of the March meetings demanding the School Committee's resignation.

The School Committee Is Asked to Resign

On March 8, 1943, a special meeting was held, the main subject of which concerned the School Committee hiring island teachers before hiring ones from off-island. It was an intense and long debate, inexplicably entwined with

[8] *The Inquirer*, March 4, 1843, 1.

[9] Blacks were not, but it was a common idea at the time and Blacks were often sought out in times of epidemics to help aid the sick, as in the 1792 yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia. Tragically, many Blacks also contracted the fever and died.

[10] Ibid, April 1, 1843, 2.

[11] Ibid.

school segregation, and, after a motion to adjourn was voted down, William Starbuck resolved:

> That if there be individuals of the School Committee opposed to conducting the schools agreeable to the wishes of the Town that they be hereby requested to resign.[12]

The motion referred to moves anticipated by the committee to integrate the schools, despite the recent town vote to the contrary. Moderator Andrew Macy said that it was too late in the day to fully discuss the resolution and it was voted to meet the following afternoon.

The next day, John Shaw moved to lay Starbuck's resolution on the table. His motion was defeated and discussion continued. Josiah Macy, a supporter of integration, and also a School Committee member, offered an amendment that said that School Committee members had to follow town instruction "provided any expression of the Town . . . be not, in the opinion of the Committee Contrary to Law."[13] The abolitionists were quite sure that segregation would be found illegal. But, the amendment was laid on the table. A move to lay the original motion on the table was next defeated and the discussion continued whether some School Committee members should resign. Abolitionist Isaac Austin moved to adjourn for yet another day, and this was accepted.

On the third day, the abolitionists tried to call the question, but were outvoted. Then they questioned Moderator Macy what would happen if the committee were to resign. Macy said, in his opinion, the town would not be able to elect a new committee until the next annual town meeting, almost a year away. Charles Bunker immediately argued that point, and in a quandary, the group again adjourned.

Dr. Winslow opened the fourth day of debate with an amendment that expressed "the utmost confidence in the integrity, intentions and conduct" of the School Committee. The amendment added that the committee should comply with town wishes, with the loophole only if they were "compatible with the interest of these institutions,"[14] knowing the School Committee would agree that segregation was not in the interest of education. The lengthy Winslow amendment included provisions for continuing the African School for those families in the neighborhood who might desire to educate their children there; and provided, finally, that any prior town votes conflicting with these resolutions be revoked. But, his resolutions were laid on the table and the conflict continued.

John Shaw's next move was deceptively simple — the insertion of the word "legal." He moved to amend William Starbuck's original motion to read that

[12] *Nantucket Town Records*, 1843, 184.
[13] Ibid, 185.
[14] Ibid, 187.

the School Committee should resign if it did not comply with the *legal* wishes of the town. But after discussion he withdrew his amendment. Debate continued, and once again, the meeting adjourned with no resolution.

On the fifth day of debate, Shaw tried again to add the word "lawful" to the original resolution. After a complicated series of tactics, the conservatives moved the question to vote on the original motion without any further consideration of amendments.

Finally, after all the delays, maneuvers and adjournments, the motion to ask for School Committee resignations carried. But the abolitionists had prepared for that eventuality, and John Shaw presented what was called the "Preamble and Resolution." It stated specifically that the town meant the African School to be strictly for Black children and that no child with any Black ancestry would be admitted to any other school, no matter how qualified. Although this was actually the town's intent, Shaw's resolutions were laid on the table.

Shaw had another set ready, but these were also laid on the table. After a few more delaying techniques, Shaw finally moved:

> As the sense of the meeting, that the instruction relative to the African School was that the Committee keep that school for such children as may choose to go there; but when a child applies for admission into either of our schools, if residing in the district and otherwise qualified, said child shall be admitted without reference to the color of its skin.[15]

But the anti-integrationists had won the battle, and all further consideration was delayed until the next annual town meeting, eleven months away.

Thus, the long series of meetings succeeded in establishing a policy to hire local help first and in requesting the School Committee to resign. The conservatives had certainly been victorious, but their victory was only in words for the time being. The School Committee not only did not resign, but boldly proceeded with their plans to integrate.

Newspapers as a Forum for the Debate

The Islander, the more liberal paper of the town, went out of business in 1843, shortly after the March meetings. Its final editorial attacked what it had never openly attacked before — the action of the town in excluding Blacks from the schools. Perhaps it had the courage because it could not, at that point, lose subscribers.

> If we are rightly informed, this resolution to ask for committee resignations is intended to prevent the success of a project which it is stated a majority of the Committee have in view, namely the abolition of the African School now maintained in this place, and the distribution of the colored scholars among the other schools, in the same manner that white children are distributed among them.[16]

[15] Ibid, 191.
[16] *The Islander*, March 18, 1843, 2.

The Islander backed the School Committee and agreed that the committee was acting within the law, and further, that if the committee excluded Black children, it would be breaking the law.

> We readily admit, as a matter of *expediency* much can be urged against the abolition of the African School; but nothing can be urged against such a course which should have weight with those who are disposed to act strictly according to the law of the land.[17]

The editorial claimed that the members of the School Committee were state officials and, therefore, were not required to follow the wishes of those who had elected them. The article praised those who had spoken in favor of desegregation — Nathaniel Barney, Andrew Macy, John Shaw, Henry Clapp, Jr., Cyrus Pierce, Isaac Austin and a member of the Black community, Wesley Berry.

> They all urged their views with great effect, and sometimes remarkable eloquence, for their hearts were in the matter.[18]

Nathaniel Barney was singled out as the foremost orator and "liberal." No praise was alloted to the conservatives. Charles Bunker was, however, their most able advocate, according to the article. But, the rank and file supporters of exclusion were evidently rude and continually interrupted the abolitionists.

> In the present instances, it had no effect in retarding discussion, the speakers on the reform side taking no notice of it. This was the proper course. A bray is no doubt an exceedingly disagreeable noise, but its dissonance is by no means done away with by treating it with any attention.

Furthermore, the editorial stated that the louder and more boisterous the opposition, the more people will swing to the side of the calmer, more logical spokesmen.

> Many a measure which has had but a small chance of success when first advanced, has been indebted for its final triumph to the brutal opposition of its enemies, who forgot their manhood in their manner of manifesting their hatred to the cause of human advancement.[19]

Thus, in its last days, *The Islander* came out strongly on the side of equal education.

In the same edition, there was a letter from "A Colored Man," the second one written about this issue by someone in the Black community.[20] The letter writer began by attacking the myth that the Blacks in town would have been happy with their situation had it not been for White interference. He reminded the town of the Black community's unanswered address to it in 1842. He likened the Afro-American community's situation to that of the early colonists

[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] The first was the 1842 address to the town.

under British rule trying to get their rights through reasonable measures, and said that no one would argue that the colonists did not realize they were being unjustly treated—

> . . . neither will any candid person say that because the colored people have patiently submitted to a long train of abuses and usurpations, that *they* did not know they were suffering under *them*.[21]

He then attacked the idea he had heard expressed at town meeting that if someone did not *know* they were being deprived that it was all right to deprive them. "A Colored Man" exploded this theory using several examples, including the absurdity of condoning a robbery as long as the victim is unaware of it. Such ideas were very dangerous, he said, "striking at the very root of the liberties of us all."[22]

With the demise of *The Islander*, the only outlet was the more conservative *Inquirer*, in which, from April 1 to July 1, a series of letters appeared from a spokesman from each side of the debate. "B" once again wrote in favor of integration and "Fair Play" wrote against it, each one attempting to refute the previous letter of the other, and each claiming to know "the truth."

"Fair Play" principally feared amalgamation:

> I propose a word on the propriety of mixing white and colored children in our schools—I am opposed to it—first because it will inflict a permanent injury upon the schools, injuring both the white and colored children, and is not necessary to preserve the rights of the colored children. Secondly, because it innvolves the principle of amalgamation, which is contrary to the laws of nature and of Nature's God.[23]

He went on to say that he agreed that if the rights of one person were violated that the rights of all were threatened. He also agreed that the laws recognized no color distinction and that an equal education was due the Black children. He believed, however, that the goal could be accomplished in what was later to be known as "separate but equal" education (*Plessy vs. Ferguson* Supreme Court Case of 1896). Seemingly reasonable up to this point, he then revealed deep-seated racial prejudice.

> . . . Whenever a claass of persons from any circumstances whether conventional, or founded in nature, is so very obnoxious to the vast majority of our citizens as to threaten the destruction of our schools, the community have the right to obviate the difficulty by providing for such a class separately, but they must open up to the obnoxious class, and to all others, the full advantages secured by law.[24]

"Fair Play" tried to temper his argument by continually referring to democracy and to the greatest good for all. He also agreed that high school

[21]Ibid.
[22]Ibid.
[23]*The Inquirer*, April 15, 1843, 2.
[24]Ibid.

education should be allowed to Afro-Americans such as Eunice Ross, but separately. He buttressed his argument by referring to God's intention of keeping the races separate by making them different colors. "God, Himself, has written a distinction, and so legibly that we could not, if we would, disregard it." He further offered that the senses could note the differences—by eye and nose, referring to "a peculiar odor" emanating from Black people.

> . . . there is enough in these to make white folks almost universally to start back at some point short of the extreme amalgamation, which I deem to be intermarriage. The friend of the Black will not descend to that brutal intercourse, induced by uncontrolled passions which outrages the laws of God and men. . . .[25]

He further stated that those few Whites who had married Afro-Americans had been induced by the "fury of fanaticism" or "insanity." He did not state directly that Blacks were inferior and said that he would *not* say that, but said he found it peculiar that Blacks would desire to mix with Whites unless they also recognized Whitee superiority. He concluded with a note of outrageous friendliness to the Black community.

> I have penned these lines in no unfriendly spirit to colored persons. The writer does not personally object to school amalgamation, to an occasional mixture in the social circle, or to riding or eating with colored persons . . .[26]

He even concluded that he did not know how he would have felt about intermarriage had he not sought a white wife. He stated that he had always been a friend to the poor, friendless and downtrodden people in society, but felt that the Blacks were getting undue attention.

"B" replied to "Fair Play" acknowledging his "good temper" in admitting that Blacks were entitled to an equal education and that the law had no color distinction:

> Why was Eunice F. Ross refused her place in the High School? Did she enjoy an equal privilege with the 17 who were admitted when she was examined, none of whom was so well equalified as herself? Did she enjoy the benefit of our school law?—But some will say a substitute was offered—Yes, but who are to judge whether that substitute is equivalent to the right which is denied? Certainly not those who are interested to proffer it . . . I reiterate it, because it is true, that they are entitled by law to *equal*, not *equivalent* privileges . . .[27]

"B" argued that the School Committee might just as well have created a school for merchants' children and another for laborers'. He argued also that the Black children could not be as well educated in *one* school intended to teach all ages since that arrangement meant there would be only a few pupils per level within the school.

"B" recognized "Fair Play's" fear of amalgamation as pure prejudice.

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid, April 22, 1843, 2.

"What a comment, is this prejudice, upon the christianity of the age in which we live?"[28]

"Fair Play" took over a month to respond, claiming that he had read in "B's" letter no new arguments and had at first decided not to reply. He changed his mind, he said, due to possible new readership. He replied to "B's" question about the reason for Eunice Ross' denial of her place, saying:

> To my knowledge this girl never had a place in the High School. The School Committee undoubtedly refused her admission to that school on account of her color, and this it was their duty to do for any peculiarity so obnoxious to the great mass . . .[29]

"Fair Playy" said that the substitute the School Committee created for the blacks *was* a high school! He again repeated his separate but equal doctrine

> If two high schools are established, one for colored and the other for white children, precisely alike as to the qualifications of teachers and all advantages I would like for B to say which party ought to feel agrieved. . . . The fact is, the whites are denied admission to one and the blacks to the other, but both parties stand on the ground of perfect equality before the law.[30]

"Fair Play" repeated his argument about amalgamation being contrary to nature, making the quantum leap from children going to school together to marrying each other. He also tried to strengthen his argument about body odor by referring to Thomas Jefferson's idea that Blacks secreted less by the kidneys and more by the liver. He again related how the School Committee was obliged to exclude contagious children, and added:

> Some dislike canker, measles, whooping-cough and other contagious diseases more than they do colored children, others dislike the colored children the most; there is no accounting for taste . . .[31]

In this letter "Fair Play" made no gesture of friendliness to the Black community, and one can only surmise the pain and indignation of Eunice Ross at being the subject of so many letters and conversations referring to her qualifications, possible odor and obnoxiousness.

Fair Play" concluded:

> The grand truth in this matter stands so boldly—it is this. Blacks and whites must *forever* be distinct races. The truth is felt, and acted upon almost universally. The exception is incipient abolitionists who atone for a deficiency of knowledge by a surcharge of zeal.[32]

"B" responded in an extremely long letter on May 27, 1843. He acknowledged that his previous arguments were well-worn, but said they were ones that had never been successfully refuted.

[28]Ibid.
[29]Ibid, May 20, 1843, 2.
[30]Ibid.
[31]Ibid.
[32]Ibid.

> Everybody knows the injustice which was done that girl Eunice Ross and if she had been the daughter of some of our citizens, nay, if she had been the daughter of Fair Play, he would have known it; but she was the daughter of an obscure colored man, and her oppressors had power and numbers on their side, and those were sufficient to exclude her from a constitutional right. The records of the Town will be a standing memorial of the truth of this . . .[33]

"B" said it was ridiculous to talk about odor, and that even if such were true, White people had contacts with Blacks daily and were not troubled. His newest argument was that of equal taxation. He singled out Nantucket's wealthy Afro-American, Captain Absalom Boston, one-time captain of a whaling ship, and said that Captain Boston paid more taxes than "B" in support of the public schools, but could send his children only to one of those schools, despite its distance from his house. He also demolished the argument for separate schools on the grounds of cost per number of scholars.

"B" then referred to a series of School Committee meetings held, of which no records exist, at which Chairman Nathaniel Barney spoke in favor of integration.

> Fair Play heard the argument of the chairman of the School Committee on the last day of the series of meetings held on this very subject, and it was embodied in one of the most eloquent appeals which was ever pronounced in the Town Hall . . .[34]

The newspaper did not write any articles about this series of meetings, but it is logical to speculate that they were well-attended and heated.

"Fair Play" felt compelled to respond once again to "B." His letter was a repetition of his previous arguments about the laws of nature, but he was becoming less polite and more openly racist, even accusing "B" of atheism for calling skin color an accident; none of God's designs could be accidental, according to "Fair Play." He challenged "B" to show him where in the law was "separate and equal" made illegal, and he ended by claiming that separation of the races was "the mandate of God."[35]

Thus, "B" and "Fair Play" argued publically about integration. Feelings about the subject were stimulated not only by the February town meeting and the March meetings which resulted in the ignored request to have the School Committee resign, but also by the fact that the School Committee, despite public opinion, was proceeding with integrating the island schools.

Integration

The series of School Committee meetings that "B" had mentioned in his last letter resulted in the decision to integrate, despite the votes of the town, reasoning that the law would uphold the Committee. Perhaps it was felt that

[33] Ibid, May 27, 1843, 2.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid, July 1, 1843.

successful integration would diminish opposition. The committee changed the name of the African School to the York Street School, and designated it a primary school for any children in the neighborhood, which did include Whites. Fifty-one children of both races attended the school. A primary school teacher was hired, an action which the committee reported saved the town money because a teacher qualified to teach at a multilevel school was more costly. Black children were admitted to schools closest to their homes for which they were qualified. Presumably Eunice Ross was admitted to the high school.

The committee in its annual report explained that it had come to its decision because of the application "of some colored child or children" to a grammar school. It is unknown who these children were, or how many applied.

The report said that the new policy involved about 15 Afro-American scholars, and that "the behavior of the children so placed, has been so good" that only one complaint had been made. The committee justified itself by referring to the Constitution, the laws of the Commonwealth and the teachings of Christ.

The report concluded, saying that great progress in education had taken place on Nantucket that year.

> In a few years, the thousand fastidious notions of the proud, the haughty and the selfish, who supposed that their children would be degraded by mixing in School, with the children of their poor neighbor, or that their money would buy for their children a better education, than they would receive in the public Schools, or that if the whole public were well educated, there would be more to cook, and many more of about equal weight, have been swept away into the great sea of bygone follies . . .[10]

Reaction to Integration

The next town meeting, in 1844, was explosive. Unfortunately, it is the only year for which there are no newspapers extant, so evidence must rest solely on town records.

Forty-nine people ran for the School Committee, and previously popular town officials were voted out. Townspeople were very angry at having their wishes thwarted. Seven of the eight people who signed the School Committee's Majority Report were voted out of office.[11] Other abolitionists who ran for town offices also lost, including David Joy, the formerly popular Selectman, who received only thirty-two votes. Isaac Austin, once Chairman of the Education Committee, received only one vote, and Andrew Macy did little better with two. The only visible abolitionist who retained his seat was Obed Barney, who curiously did not sign the Majority Report. Later, one member of the School Committee resigned, and former chairman Nathaniel

[10] *Nantucket Town Records*, 1844, 249.

[11] Nathaniel Barney, John Shaw, Cyrus Pierce, Eben Coleman, Richard Mitchell, Edward Kelly and Andrew Morton.

Barney ran again and lost. Thus, the prospect for continuing the integration policy was doubtful.

Immediately, the Committee's annual report became a hot item. One entire morning was devoted to its reading by Nathaniel Barney, as well as to a Minority Report, filed by Samuel H. Jenks.

Jenks was a member of the previous School Committee and to be chairman of the next one. Long-time editor of *The Inquirer*, he had been responsible for the establishment of public education on Nantucket and had served for many years on the School Committee. On this particular educational issue his paper was unusually silent, occasionally expressing only the desire to have the matter settled. Certainly Jenks was no abolitionist and frequently expounded against Garrison and those of his ilk. He did oppose slavery and slave-hunting, yet he also opposed integration. He did not approve of the abolitionists' methods, especially the integration of the school system in direct opposition to the town's wishes.

> . . . The true question as I consider it, is not whether all children are equally entitled to educational privileges provided by laws, but whether the action of the School Committee within the last year, was best adapted to secure those privileges, as well to *white* as to *colored* children . . .[38]

He noted that by integrating a small number of Black children, that some Whites had left the school system, proving that "equality of privileges have not been fully *enjoyed*, however it may be fancied to have been *established*."

Jenks said that the Black children did not benefit by being moved to other schools.

> . . . I disagree with the majority of my respected colleagues in regard to the expediency of transferring the character of the York Street School, from that of a general Seminary wherein all the branches taught in the Introductory, Primary, and Grammar Schools, were, or could be studied, to that of a school of a lower grade. That School, before this change, possessed peculiar advantages—a convenient location; an able instructor; and so few pupils (about 30) that consequently, each commanded more of the attention and services of the teacher, than anyone can now obtain, who has been removed into a larger school, with some 200 School fellows. . . .[39]

Jenks did not ask for his report to be translated into action by the town, but merely added it to the end of the School Committee Report.

After the reading of Jenks' report, it was voted to lay both reports on the table, which meant the report describing the integration program was not voted upon. The town, in this move, was deliberately not recognizing its existence. By not accepting the report, the town was making it easier for the new segregationist School Committee to go ahead with resegregating the Nantucket public schools.

[38]Ibid, 254.
[39]Ibid.

However, the following day, motions were introduced to take up the Majority Report. Eventually, the town voted to accept only that part of the report dealing with finances, indefinitely postponing the rest. Samuel Jenks then reread his Minority Report and the town voted to connect it to the regular report. Then, the town voted to lay the entire matter on the table and adjourned until the afternoon.

In the afternoon, they discussed a motion by Charles Bunker to postpone indefinitely voting on the reports, but John Shaw's plea to adjourn for further consideration was heeded.[39]

On the following day, a School Committee member resigned and Shaw's motion to delay debate until a new member was elected was accepted. William Gurrill, a segregationist, was elected. It was then voted to postpone the School Committee Report until after all other town business. There was a final abolitionist effort to have the report considered and a division of the house called for. But, only 148 were against the indefinite postponement; 213 were in favor of it, carrying the motion.

Shaw tried to salvage the School Committee's work of the year by moving

> That the Town by their vote postponing indefinitely the School Committee Report do not mean to deprive any colored child of a place in any of our public Schools, they being qualified as to scholarship and living in the district.[40]

But William Starbuck, who had retained his seat on the School Committee, moved that Shaw's resolution be put off until the next town meeting, a full year away. Starbuck's motion was accepted, making it very clear that the majority did not want integration to continue.

Andrew Macy made the next move, offering the following resolution:

> Resolved: That the Town *do* mean to deprive any child having any appreciable mixture of Negro or Indian blood, of the privilege of attending any schools where there are white children.[41] (emphasis added)

Macy may have hoped that the town either would vote his motion down, thence allowing the School Committee's actions with regard to the African School to stand, or else for the town to take a definitive stand on segregation and perhaps lead the way to legal action.

William Easton amended Macy's motion by stating that the town meant for the education of Afro-Americans to be separate "as far as the same may be deemed practical,"[42] thus making it appear that the town was not completely anti-integration. This was a semantical game as it was eminently clear that the new School Committee would revert to total segregation of the races. But this made it possible for the committee to move the Black children back to the African School and to refuse their admittance to the other schools on the

[39]Ibid, 227.
[41]Ibid.
[42]Ibid.

grounds of practicality. Alexander Macy immediately resigned from the School Committee, apparently unable to comply with the town's segregationist wishes. William Starbuck moved to elect a new member at the next meeting, and the group adjourned.

The town met again the following day and heard a number of motions and counter-motions, but the decisions of the previous days stood. Thus, the 1844 annual town meeting unseated the abolitionist School Committee members, did not hear the entire School Committee Report, and made it clear that it did not accept integration.

Segregation Reinstituted

Within the next few months, the new School Committee voted to transfer the Afro-American children back to the African School. In April, the Selectmen posted a notice for a special town meeting.

> To take into consideration the action of the School Committee in regard to the removal of the colored children from the public schools to that in York Street.[41]

On Friday, April 19, the meeting took place; the removal of the children was scheduled to take place the following Monday. Again, there are no indications as to the size of the crowd, but it is logical to assume that the event was well attended, especially by the angry Afro-American community which had seen its children peacefully integrated for almost a year, only to have this threat of removal back to the African School.

Thomas Macy resolved that the contemplated segregation was "unconstitutional and illegal" and that the meeting should prevent such an action.[41]

School Committee member Charles Bunker countered with a motion to table Macy's resolution, which the electorate accepted.

Undaunted, John Shaw also moved that the action would be "unconstitutional and illegal." It is recorded that Shaw "addressed the meeting at some length."[43] But, despite his plea, the resolution was not adopted.

Other abolitionists then addressed the meeting. They were Cyrus Pierce, Matthew Myrich, Peter Macy, Andrew Macy, and a member of the Black community, Wesley Berry.

Thomas Macy, an abolitionist, was chosen Moderator for the afternoon session, but Charles Bunker began the session by moving that the town approve of the anticipated action by the School Committee. This was accepted, thus effectively ending the integration of the Nantucket School System.

Andrew Macy, in a last-ditch effort to get the town to commit itself openly to racial discrimination and possible legal action, amended the motion.

[41]Ibid, 273.
[42]Ibid, 271.
[43]Ibid.

That the Town instruct the School Committee to place the exclusion on the ground of color and make their record to that effect.[46]

This was accepted; finally the town had admitted in the official records that which it had been practicing all along—racial discrimination.

Macy, following up on his minor victory, moved next that the committee notify each Black child explicitly as to why he was being transferred back to the African School—"because of your color."[47]

John Shaw, following Macy's lead, moved that the African School was established solely for Blacks and that the School Committee should "advertise in the newspaper that such is the case."[48] But, the town would not accept these two explicit statements, even though the motions clearly stated that that was actually being done.

The last move the abolitionists made that day was another motion by Shaw, saying "that the York Street School is *not* established exclusively for colored children."[49] But, this also was defeated and the fateful meeting adjourned. All the headway the previous School Committee had made was lost. A variety of maneuvers had been tried to save their work, but all had failed. The town had clearly and emphatically shown its approval of the new committee's decision to resegregate the Nantucket public schools.

[46]Ibid, 273.
[47]Ibid.
[48]Ibid.
[49]Ibid.

Chapter IV:
Resolution of the Integration Issue

Afro-American Boycott of Schools

Many in the Afro-American community decided to boycott the school system entirely, rather than send their children back to the African School. Evidence also shows that some White parents withdrew their children from the system as a protest. According to a petition in the Massachusetts State House vaults and the School Committee Report of 1845, the boycott was successful. Black children refused to return to the African School and the School Committee, after several months of unsuccessful persuasion, had to fill it with White children.

> . . . Said colored children having been kept from the School they established at their door, in despite of the efforts of the School Committee to cause their attendance, the School house aforesaid is now of neccessity, occupied chiefly by white children, coming from greater distances, who would forthwith be transferred, so soon as the said colored inhabitants may please to avail themselves of the ample provision made by the town in the premises. . . .[1]

Thus, for the remainder of 1844, many Black children received no education from the town. Undoubtedly informal provisions were made for some of them, although no evidence verifies this.

The Black community also sought legal counsel to explore means of forcing the town to desegregate the schools. But, this proved fruitless.

> . . . They, have applied to some of the first lawyers in the Commonwealth, and are informed that they can get no redress, through the law as it is . . .[2]

Thus, the Black community found that the only way it could force the town to desegregate was by actually changing the law, an ambitious project, but the only recourse left to them, as the town was obviously not about to integrate the schools on its own initiative.

[1]Petition presented in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, February 4, 1845.

[2]Petition presented in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, January 16, 1845. See Appendix for complete text.

Early in 1845, a petition was presented in the Massachusetts House of Representatives by a Mr. Earle, a representative of Worcester. This petition was presented on behalf of Edward J. Pompey and 104 other Afro-American citizens of Nantucket. The petition stated that 30–40 children were being deprived of equal education; it mentioned neither skin color nor Nantucket. The Blacks likened their position to that of being in a South Carolina jail, and they asked the legislature to enact legislation to protect all children "in their equal right to the schools. . . ."[3] Their petition was referred to the Education Committee.

Two weeks later, the House of Representative's Journal noted that Mr. Wood of Nantucket presented a petition on behalf of Peter Macy and 235 Whites in support of the Pompey petition. This, too was directed to the Education Committee.

> "The undersigned, citizens of Nantucket, represent that they believe that the colored citizens of this town have good and sufficient reason to petition your honorable Bodies for such amendment of the school law as will secure to their children the right of Equal Education at the public expense, and they ask that the petition of Edward J. Pompey and 104 others may be granted.[4]

Another petition, dated January 27, in the State House vaults supported the Pompey petition, but it does not appear in the official House record. Perhaps it was presented along with, and considered part of, Macy's. At any rate, it is much shorter and signed by only 17 White Nantucket men. It is written in the same vein supporting the Pompey petition.

> The undersigned, citizens of Nantucket, respectfully request you so to alter the School Law as to extend to all children the *same educational rights*.[5]

On February 4, two more petitions were presented to the House, these in opposition to the Pompey petition. The two new petitions were presented by George Harris, a Nantucket representative, on behalf of Harvey Crocker and 220 others, as well as Nathaniel Fitzgerald and 128 others. They are identically worded, although split into two separate petitions. These 350 people called themselves "memorialists" and defended the School Committee. They said that the Pompey petition had taken them by surprise, which can hardly have been the case considering the Black boycott. The "memorialists" described how the Black citizens lived in a separate section of town where there was "an excellent school, capable of accommodating fifty scholars. . . ."[6]

[3]Ibid.
[4]Petition presented in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, January 29, 1845.
[5]Ibid, January 27, 1845.
[6]Petition presented in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, February 4, 1845.

They stated that the sole reason for the maintenance of the separate school was geographic location and that

> whenever any colored children may abide in other sections of the town, they are freely admitted to the schools in the vicinity of their said residence.[7]

The only reason there had been any loss of rights, the petition said, was due to "influence of individuals who have persuaded them . . . not to attend the school provided for them."

The petition concluded that there was no need to "disturb order and prosperity of our school system," by any "untoward legislation."[8]

The sixth, and final petition was presented to the House of Representatives on February 27, again by the Mr. Earle of Worcester who had presented the Pompey petition. This unique petition was written and signed by only one person: Eunice Ross. In firm and legible handwriting, she told her own story about having been denied access to the high school.

> The undersigned respectfully requests that the prayer of the petition of E.J. Pompey and others may be granted—the undersigned has good reason to feel on this subject, as she was found amply qualified for admission into the High School at Nantucket and was refused admittance by a vote of the Town, instructing the School Committee not to admit her, on account of her color.[9]

Unlike the other petitions, hers was sent to the Judiciary Committee. However, it eventually wound up with the others in the Education Committee.

The result of these petitions was House Bill Number 45 which prohibited discrimination in the public schools. The bill was read the required three times during March and, on March 25, 1845 the bill was passed by both houses. The new law guaranteed equal education to all students, something the Commonwealth supposedly had already done, and gave parents or guardians the right to sue their towns for damages.[10] It appeared as if Nantucket would now be forced to integrate the schools to ensure equal education.

Town Meeting Votes to Continue Segregation

Schools on Nantucket were not integrated in 1845, despite the new legislation. Town meeting took place in the midst of the presentations of the petitions and a month before the new law was passed. But even if the law had been passed prior to town meeting, it is unlikely Nantucket would have obeyed the new law; the town was not ready to give in yet.

Once again Majority and Minority Reports were filed by the School Committee, only this time Samuel Jenks was Chairman and in the majority, show-

[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid, February 27, 1845.
[10] *Proceedings of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1845, No. 45.* See Appendix for full text of the law.

ing the complete turnabout made in one year. George H. Folger filed the dissenting report.

In the Majority Report, the School Committee said that it had operated fifteen different schools that year for pupils age four to sixteen, accommodating approximately 1,500 students. The first few pages of the report are full of self-pity and of the thanklessness of being a School Committee member; evidently members had come under a bit of pressure what with petitions to the state legislature as well as a boycott.

The committee commented on the "agitation and debate"[11] about the question of educating the town's Black children. It reported how the African School had been reverted to its former status. They replaced the female primary school teacher with a "very competent" male teacher, fully qualified to teach all levels, except that of high school.

The committee was obviously angered by Black resistance to relocation, saying that members "were thwarted by influences beyond their power or previous to control."[12]

George Folger in his Minority Report said that he had protested in vain all year about the reestablishment of segregation. He said that he opposed the School Committee policy first, because he believed the decision was based not on vicinity, as the committee tried to claim, but solely on color. Folger said this was "not only highly unjust but opposed to the whole intent and spirit of the law."[13] Secondly, he said he wrote his dissent because the School Committee had, in his opinion, deprived a portion of the town's children of the advantages of a classified education. (Classified meant the breakdown into the various levels of schools.) Thirdly, he said he was convinced that the African School was not in quality equal to the schools provided for White children, especially at the upper levels.

His report concluded by saying that although he was the only one actually signing the report, two others "were united in opinion and action with him."[14] At least one of those had died, perhaps both, as the School Committee that year lost two members to death, and two to ill health.

The School Committee elected in 1845 again reflected the desire to keep Blacks separate. Seven members were reelected, and considering that six others did not run again due to death, illness or personal matters, the vote was an overwhelming vote of confidence for the course taken by the School Committee. George Folger, the lone dissenter, lost his bid for reelection.

However, despite the odds, the supporters of integration did not sit back. Thomas Macy moved for the School Committee to bring in all records pertaining to the education of Black children. A minor victory, this was accepted.

[11] *Nantucket Town Records*, 1845, 24.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid, 29.
[14] Ibid.

However, William Easton immediately moved to reconsider the motion. Then the town proceeded to defeat Macy's motion, although it had been passed only minutes before!

Two days later, Andrew Macy tried to have those parts of the School Committee Report dealing with segregation postponed, but this failed. Outvoted, the abolitionists witnessed as the town accepted the entire School Committee Report, thus condoning segregation for yet another year.

Andrew Macy, borrowing words directly from Folger's Minority Report, moved that it be the sense of the town that the system of education for the Black children was highly unjust, and further, that the grammar schools be opened up to all qualified students. This failed.

Macy next moved the opposite of what he would have liked, in another attempt to have the town endorse its discriminatory policy publicly.

> Resolved: That it is the sense of this Town that a classification of children in the public Schools, based on color is not only Just in itself, but in accordance with the whole Spirit and intent of the Law; that the York Street School in very truth, such a School as is furnished for the bulk of our children, under the name of Grammar Schools, finally that the admission into the Orange Street, West or North Grammar School, should not be granted to all children between the ages of 6 and 16, who have made the requisite educational progress.[15]

The electorate saw this resolution as the set-up it was. People knew the education provided to the Afro-American children was not equal to that of a grammar school and would not vote for Macy's amendment.

Thus, the 1845 meeting preserved the status quo; Blacks continued to boycott the schools and hoped that the Legislature would come to their aid.

It did, as we know, by the passage of Bill No. 45 in March. Unfortunately, no newspapers are extant for this period.[16] However, it was soon evident that Nantucket was going to disregard the new Massachusetts law. Besides, the segregationists argued that the town was meeting the new law in that they claimed that the races were obtaining equal education.

Phebe Ann Boston vs. the Town of Nantucket

In August, William Lloyd Garrison again visited Nantucket and launched a diatribe against the island. He called the clergymen especially hypocritical, which infuriated the islanders, ever proud of their religious heritage. *The Inquirer* countered by saying that Garrison had many bigots in *his* organization.

There is scanty yet tantalizing evidence that Nantucket's Blacks began legal procedures that would have enabled them to press charges against the town based on the recently passed law. Phebe Ann Boston, age seventeen, evidently applied to enter either a grammar school or the high school and was

[15] Ibid, 325.

[16] *The Inquirers* have been lost for the months of March, May and June.

Portrait of Captain Absalom F. Boston by unknown artist. It hangs in the Peter Foulger Museum on Nantucket.
Photo by W. Frederick Lucas

refused. Her father, Captain Absalom Boston, initiated legal action against the town. The first mention of this in the town records was on September 3, 1845, at a specially called town meeting. The second article on the warrant was

> To see what order the town will take, in relation to an action brought by Phebe Ann Boston by her Father and next friend, for depriving her of the advantages of Public School instruction.[17]

The article was read, but it was voted to move on to other town business. Later a motion was accepted that "the Town defend the action brought against it by Phebe Ann Boston."[18] It was moved to have two agents appointed. Isaac Austin moved to amend it that the Selectmen see to the matter, but finally a motion from Charles Bunker was accepted to have the School Committee attend to the matter.

John Shaw attempted to resolve the matter without judicial intervention by moving that Captain Boston be asked to drop his suit if the town would agree to take children into any school regardless of skin color. This was defeated.

Next, Andrew Macy resolved in almost identical fashion that the town integrate the schools. It seems that Macy never tired of offering resolutions doomed to certain failure. This particular motion was ruled by Moderator William Easton, the anti-integrationist, to be out of order. He said it did not pertain to the article in the warrant. But, Macy tried again, moving "that the School Committee be instructed to admit Phebe Ann Boston."[19] Again, he was ruled out of order for irrelevancy. The question under discussion, according to Easton, was the town's action in defense of the suit—not a resolution of the suit and integration.

Isaac Austin next attempted to resolve the matter by moving that the town, and the agents of Captain Boston, refer the entire matter to "three of the most eminent council of the State of Massachusetts."[20] But this compromise suggestion was laid on the table.

The meeting ended leaving the question in the hands of the School Committee, and they certainly were not ready to make any accommodating deals with Absalom Boston.

The Inquirer reported later in September that they had picked up from an unnamed off-island newspaper an "exchange . . . in reference to the Absalom Boston case."[21] *The Inquirer* made no comment on the following article:

[17] Ibid, 53.
[18] Ibid, 54.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] *The Inquirer*, September 30, 1845, 2.

> The conduct of the town of Nantucket, in this case, is palpably illegal and unconstitutional, as well as despicable and unchristian. No distinction of complexion is now known by statute in Massachusetts, among its inhabitants.
>
> As questions of a similar character have caused some discussions in other places, the progress and results of this suit will be watched with no little interest.[22]

Thus, the Boston case had achieved off-island attention.

Although the case was mentioned in the town records in September, it was not recorded until a month later in the records of the Court of Common Pleas. These state that the case was "Phebe Ann Boston by Absalom F. Boston vs. the Inhabitants of Nantucket." The representatives of the town were noted as "Coffin and Charles Bunker." Bunker was a School Committee member; Coffin probably refers to one of the two School Committee members named Coffin, but it was a common Nantucket name. Representing Captain Boston were "Clifford and Brigham," probably off-islanders, as their names are not in the 1840 census.

However, the records noted that the case was "removed to the Supreme Judicial Court upon the affadvid [sic] of deft [defendant's] Council."[23] So, for some reason, the case was transferred to another court. This delayed the case for almost an entire year, leaving the school system still segregated and the Black community in the midst of a lengthening boycott.

There was an indirect reference to the Boston Case in November, 1845, when *The Inquirer* reported on a local Whig meeting. Samuel Jenks, still on the School Committee, felt he had been slighted at that meeting, as he had not been allowed to present some resolutions. (In addition, he had lost a nomination to be a Whig candidate by 18 votes.) So, he decided to print the resolutions in his newspaper. The first resolution was for the Whigs to vote disapproval of people trying to divide the party: "by the introduction of influence and schemes tending to injure, and finally to destroy our Public School system."[24]

His second resolution was to vote to denounce parents who kept their children out of the public schools due to "pride of wealth" or "hostility." He further called such parents "unfit judges of the motives and views of others whose children are receiving the advantages of those schools."[25]

Lastly, he resolved that people who belonged to the Liberty Party, which favored "indiscriminate amalgamation" in the schools would end up by actually being unjust to Blacks. He "proved" his theory by saying that a previous experiment (the 1843 short-lived integration) had shown that Blacks lived too far away from other schools anyhow.

[22]Ibid.
[23]*Court of Common Pleas*, Nantucket, 1845, 201.
[24]Ibid, November 10, 1845
[25]*The Mirror*, January 17, 1846

Nothing came of his resolutions and the issue was not mentioned for the remainder of 1845.

1846 Town Meeting: Public Opinion Shifts

Despite the 1845 law, Nantucket Schools were still segregated and no one had successfully sued the town, with the Bostons' case still pending. The initial flush of success at the law's passage had worn off and it appeared that the town would never integrate the school system.

In a new local paper, *The Mirror,* there was an editorial in January 1846, lamenting the fact that the school integration issue was hurting the excellent school system that had been operating on the island. But the paper took no stand except to say that the "vexed question" should be settled quickly.[26] (*The Inquirer* is not extant until August 31 of this year.)

The annual town meeting of 1846 had less overt controversy about segregation, the issue which had dominated the meetings since 1840. The School Committee Report made it very clear that the Committee was solidly behind segregated education, explaining that the Blacks were better off being educated separately at the African School. The long boycott had weakened and Blacks were gradually refilling the school. Black parents had to choose between having no formal education for their children, or accepting inferior education. Many were unwilling to deprive their children totally for such a prolonged period of time, despite their convictions about the inequity of the Nantucket school system.

The School Committee said that it had complied with the wishes of the town, believing that the separate system they had provided had not deprived anyone of his rights. The committee said that it actually had no *right* to integrate.

> . . . it had no right to gratify the wish of a small portion of the inhabitants for a social amalgamation, offensive to all the rest.
>
> While the Schools by this action have been saved from the odium to which an inter-mixture of distinct races, would have exposed them, care has been taken, that the instruction proposed by law be afforded to all.[27]

The report also expressed sorrow that the "colored question" had created "such a root of bitterness."

The name of the African School had been changed to York Street Grammar School, even though it still housed multiple levels. The teacher was praised: ". . . his success has been as great as the materials with which had to work should warrant."[28] It is uncertain whether the "materials" meant the physical resources or the pupils.

[26] *The Mirror*, January 17, 1846, 2.
[27] *Nantucket Town Records*, 1846, 105.
[28] Ibid.

Then the Committee launched into an attack on Whites who had supposedly agitated the Black community. Once again this sentiment was expressed despite the independent efforts of the Afro-American community going back at least to 1842. The Committee blamed the Whites "who call themselves the friends of the colored people" for actually victimizing the Blacks.[29]

> One peculiarity of this feud is, that the parties to the controversy are not the victims of the conflict . . . then the innocent pupils become the sufferers in the unholy war . . .

Furthermore, the agitators were seen as anti-education:

> . . . we behold a fierce hostility which seeks for vulnerable points, not that they may be cured, but through which to stab.[30]

The committee called upon people to "extinguish partisan feelings," to "suppress vindictive spirit" and "labor together in love for the benefit of the most valuable public institution among us." They appealed to abolitionists who "may love the colored race much, (to) love their own children more."[31]

Finally, the committee argued that it was especially improper "to agitate this exciting question" due to the pending court case because it might influence potential jurors. It would be difficult to conceive of any islander unaware of this controversy which had now extended for over six years and who could be considered totally impartial. Yet, the School Committee called for a cessation of the discussion of integration so that jurors would "be protected from any external influence."[32]

It seems as if the abolitionists did minimize their efforts to integrate the schools at this meeting and employed none of their usual tactics. They, too, were waiting for the Boston Case to be settled; after all, they had tried for so many years to work through the town meeting system and had failed.

Only John Shaw made a motion relevant to the issue. He moved to strike the three most inflammatory paragraphs of the School Committee Report, the ones attacking the so-called friends of the Blacks. Amazingly, Shaw's motion was carried. It appears that a majority of people wanted to see the issue settled and the tones of the opposing factions lowered.

More than that, it was evident that the mood of the town was changing. The intervening years hide the reasons, but the conservatives were on their way out. So, when the election for the new School Committee was held, the three most outspoken conservatives of previous committees—Samuel Jenks, William Starbuck and William Easton—lost. In fact, not *one* of the previous thirteen members was retained. The abolitionists scored an overwhelming victory with at least nine known integrationists on the new committee. All were

[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid.
[31]Ibid, 406.
[32]Ibid.

noted for their long-term struggle against segregation, but it must have been especially gratifying to John Shaw, who had submitted so many futile motions at so many meetings. George Folger, the lone signer of the 1845 Minority Report who had lost his bid for election the previous year, was also among those elected.[31] Once again, the abolitionists controlled the School Committee, and this time they intended integration to stick.

The Second Integration of Nantucket Schools

The new School Committee immediately began working to integrate the schools on Nantucket again. The election of the abolitionists was interpreted as a mandate for such action and, from the report submitted at the end of their term in 1847, it is learned that Afro-American children were admitted into the schools for which they were qualified.

> On the first entrance day of the past year, a larger portion of the children than composing the York Street School, together with a number who had for some time been deprived of educational privileges, applied for admission into the several public schools in the section where they severally resided, and were duly admitted.[32]

Eunice Ross and Phebe Ann Boston finally entered integrated schools at the proper levels; Eunice was now 24. She went on to become especially proficient in French, which was a lifelong interest, according to her obituary.[33]

The school on York Street was deemed too small, and the children in primary school there were transferred to other schools. The building remained a Black church for several decades after.

The work begun by the School Committee of 1843 was now complete. The African School was defunct, and this time there was to be no later removal of students to a segregated school.

Absalom Boston's case was still pending, and in July 1846, the Superior Court recorded the case and then wrote "misentry" next to it, a unique and peculiar notation. It does not state that the case was dropped as was the usual procedure, but the case shows up in no other court records, so it can only be assumed that Absalom Boston did not pursue the case any further. Phebe Ann was now in an integrated school, so there was no need to continue legal action.[34]

Thus, after the long years of protest, defeat, petitions and a boycott, the public school system on Nantucket was integrated.

[31] Others were Obed Barney, Alexander Macy, Edward Folger, Ebenezer Coleman, Joseph Mitchell, Richard Mitchell and Edward Kelley, all backers of the 1845 petition supporting the Pompey petition.

[32] Ibid, 1847, 47–48.

[33] Tragically, she was to die of dysentery a few years later at the age of twenty-one.

Appendix A

PETITION OF EUNICE ROSS TO THE MASSACHUSETTS STATE HOUSE, 1845

To the Hon. Senate and House of Representatives of the state of Massachusetts.

The undersigned respectfully requests that the prayer of the petition of E. J. Pompey and others may be granted—The undersigned has good reason to feel on this subject as she was examined in 1840 by the School Committee and found amply qualified for admission into the High School at Nantucket and was refused admittance by a vote of the Town, instructing the School Committee not to admit her, on account of her colour.

Eunice F. Ross

Appendix B

Address to the School Committee and Other Inhabitants of the Town of Nantucket March 2

At a public meeting of the colored inhabitants of Nantucket, held in the Zion's Church, February 23rd, 1842, the following Resolution was offered by the Reverend William Serrington, and after some remarks from Wesley Berry, William Harris and others, was adopted:

> Resolved, That whereas the law of this Commonwealth, in reference to the privilege of education in our town schools makes no distinction in relation to the complexion or symmetry of its inhabitants, it is therefore the judgment of the oppressed portion of the citizens of Nantucket, that it is their right, and they ought to claim, and do desire to enjoy, among other rights, the right of having their youth educated in the same schools which are common to the more favored members of this community.

The following Resolution was offered by William Morris:

> Resolved, That the course of those gentlemen who advocated and sustained by their votes a procedure which would enable our children to receive equal advantages with all the children of this Commonwealth, is duly appreciated by us, and entitles them to our confidence, approbation and esteem.

This resolution was advocated by William R. Robinson, C. D. Brown, and others, and was unanimously adopted.

It was voted that a committee of three be appointed to have the proceedings of this meeting, with an address to the citizens of Nantucket, published in the Nantucket Inquirer and the Islander of this place.

Address

To the School Committee, and other Inhabitants of the Town of Nantucket

Having availed ourselves of the opportunity of witnessing your proceedings at the Town Hall, a short time ago, we were forcibly struck by the matter which was then the subject of your deliberations, and on which you were called to act. It will not be necessary for us to say anything in relation to the power of the School Committee, nor of the duty which necessarily devolves

upon them, by virtue of their being a School Committee—the agents of the whole community—to attend to the department of what is called "Common School Education," and to see that the law in reference to their charge is carried out. Nor does the resolution, together with its amendment, appear to us to be of vital importance either way, if we understood the arguments that were advanced by some of the gentlemen then present; and our reasons are these,

First, the citizens of the town there assembled were not a legislature

Second, We did not assemble to offer a resolution to abolish a proscriptive and unjust law which forbade the extension of a common school privilege to all classes of the community; but, if we were assembled for anything, at the moment of action upon the amendment of that resolution, it appears to have been this, whether it be best to observe the laws which are in themselves impartial and just, and which extend like privileges to all classes of the Commonwealth!!! In bringing the subject of our claim before our fellow citizens, we wish, by no means, to convey the idea that they have inflicted a recent wound upon us, an oppressed portion of the citizens of this town, but a wound of some years standing, the sensation of which, if it be chafed, is apt to become keen. We look upon ourselves, and we feel as an INJURED PORTION of this community, and injured indeed in such a way that no member of this Commonwealth can possibly be benefited by it. It may now be asked, in what respect are you injured? How can it be shown that you are not impartially dealt with? When have your rights been violated? To these injuries, we answer briefly.

This Community, is, or may be considered, as a large society, having an instrument called a Constitution. This instrument is intended to express the object of the association, and defines the obligations under which its members have come in respect to each other. It expresses the manner in which that object is to be accomplished; that is, it declares what the individual promises to do for the society, and what the society promises to do for the individual, and the object for which the association is formed. We have also a code of laws, which is supposed to be agreeable with the spirit of the Constitution in general.

Having made the above remarks, we now take for granted that the Constitution and the laws of the Commonwealth make no distinction among its citizens on account of complexion or symmetry. If this be acknowledged, then we infer that the Constitution and the laws of this State recognize the equality of its citizens in respect to rights. Again, whatever system may be formed or arrangements made for the benefit of the members of this Commonwealth, let it be the Common School system, or any other system by which its inhabitants may be benefited or improved, the inference is, that all do not enjoy the advantages to be derived from them on equal terms, in the same manner, and in the same amount. This inference, we presume our citizens will acknowl-

edge to be reasonable and just, unless any one will attempt to show that God created man with as great a variety of rights as there are distinctions of color and form, and that society has a right to proportion the privileges of the members upon such considerations. This assumption is so big with absurdity that it needs no argument to make its inconsistency apparent. Again, the town school privileges of us who are called the colored portion of the citizens, as members of this society, and as far as Constitution and Law are concerned, are identical with those citizens in general, because there is no proscriptive act that we know of to prevent the colored citizens enjoying the Common School system of education, in the same manner, and in the same amount, that it is enjoyed by our more favored fellow citizens. But do we enjoy it because it is lawful that we should? While our more favored fellow citizens have all the facilities of obtaining a good education in a gradation of Schools, viz: Infant, Primary, Grammar, High Schools, etc. with every advantage that is calculated to inspire the youthful mind with aspirations to excel; in a word, while they enjoy every benefit that the Common School system holds out, while *we* are all rejected, and that contrary to our law, because it has pleased the good Creator to make our complexion differ from those of our fellow citizens. If this be the ground of our *exclusion*, as we have stated, and we think that our statement is undeniable, then we will most respectfully, ask this intelligent and Christian community who know this to be the ground of our exclusion, is it *right*, is it *just?*

But it will be asked—have you not presumed, that we are deeply injured, by showing that we are all, irrespective of complexional differences entitled to the same privileges, and to the same amount of education which our Common School system holds out to the rest of our fellow citizens, and that it is in the highest degree improbable that the colored children can obtain that amount of education which our Common School system is designed to furnish; and for the accomplishment of which system of education, you have needed several gradations, to which the colored children are denied access, on the ground, as we understand it, that God has made their skins rather browner than the morbid state of public opinion can very well bear! We might hear multiple words, but in what light the subject be viewed, when we reflect that we are by the Constitution and laws acknowledged to be citizens and consequently entitled to all the rights and privileges in common with other citizens, and then that for a mere accident, the difference of complexion, we are denied the right of privilege of education in common with our fellow citizens; we must pronounce it to be *unkind, unjust.*

Again, it is said that some of the colored citizens do not wish to enjoy equal privileges of education with their lighter complexioned brethren. Granted, let it be so, and then what will this prove? Will it prove that rights and privileges go by the hundred? We mean such rights and privileges as we have been speaking of. Is the Common School privilege, a privilege which, before it can

be enjoyed by any citizen, he must necessarily go round and pray every family or parent to agree with him, before he can offer his claim; or is it a right that belongs to every citizen in particular, separate and apart from whatever course his neighbor may see fit to pursue? And in this case, if there be a few persons, who, for some considerations which may be satisfactory to themselves, wish to occupy such a position in the community as must reflect upon their judgment, all that we, who desire our rights, have to say is that we do not envy their position. And again, we add, if there be any persons to be found, who do not wish, and will not claim their rights, we by no means surrender our claim as impaired on that account. We here submit these remarks to the inhabitants of the town of Nantucket, hoping that the day is not far distant, when the good sense and christianity of this republic will proceed to make its distinctions in Society on just and reasonable grounds, and not according to the color of the skin, and when the common proverb for distinction shall be, "*Mentem non frontem hominis spectate.*" In behalf of the oppressed portion of the citizens of Nantucket

Wm. Serrington
Wm. W. Morris
Wm. Harris
} Committee for Publication

Appendix C

PETITION OF EDWARD J. POMPEY AND 104 OTHERS TO
THE MASSACHUSETTS STATE HOUSE
1845

To the Senate and House of Representatives of Massachusetts in General Court assembled.

The undersigned inhabitants of Nantucket respectfully present that they have between thirty and forty children who are deprived of their right to equal instruction with other children in our Common Schools; and that they can have no instruction from the town, unless, they submit to insults, and outrages upon their rights, quite equal to being imprisoned in a *South Carolina* jail; and for no other reason, but . . . *color*.

They, have applied to some of the first lawyers in the Commonwealth, and are informed that they can get no redress, through the law as it is, they therefore pray that there may be some enactment, which will protect all children in their equal right to the schools, against the majorities of School Committees, or of those who assemble in town meetings.

Edward J. Pompey
and 104 other
Black citizens of
Nantucket including
Absalom F. Boston,
Arthur Cooper
and several members
of the Ross family.

Appendix D

HOUSE BILL NO. 45, 1845

An Act concerning Public Schools

Any child unlawfully excluded from any public school, which such child has a legal right to attend, or from public school instruction, in this Commonwealth, shall recover damages therefore, in an action on the case, to be brought in the name of said child by his guardian, or next friend, or any court of competent jurisdiction to try the same, against the city or town, by which said school is supported.

62

Bibliography

Bill of Fare (Nantucket). June 21, 1842.

Cary, Lorin Lee, and Cary, Francine C. "Absalom F. Boston, His Family and Nantucket's Black Community," *Historic Nantucket,* Summer, 1977.

Gardner, Arthur H. "The Big Shop," *Proceedings of the Nantucket Historical Association,* 1916: 35–43.

Inquirer (Nantucket). 1821–1848, March 2, 1895.

Islander (Nantucket). March 10, 1840–March 18, 1843.

Library of Congress American Buildings Survey. "African Baptist Society Church."

Massachusetts House Bill No. 45, 1845.

Massachusetts State House Vaults. Seven petitions presented to the House, 1845.

Monaghan, James. "Anti-Slavery in Nantucket," *Proceedings of the Nantucket Historical Association,* 1938: 23–26.

"John Woolman in Nantucket," *Proceedings of the Nantucket Historical Association,* 1940: 21–25.

Morning Telegraph (Nantucket). April 3, 1844, April 10, 1844, March 21, 1845, April 9, 1845.

Nantucket Court of Common Pleas. 1845.

Nantucket Supreme Judicial Court. 1846.

Nantucket Mirror. June 14, 1845–1848.

Nantucket Town Records. 1807–1849.

Nantucket Weekly Magazine. July 5, 1817–January 3, 1818.

Perkins, W. D. "Education," *Proceedings of the Nantucket Historical Association,* April 1960: 63–74.

True Copy of the Church Book of the Pleasant Street Baptist Church of Nantucket, Massachusetts, 1848–1858.

Weeks, Emily. "Women of Nantucket," Proceedings of the Nantucket Historical Association 1912: 31–47.